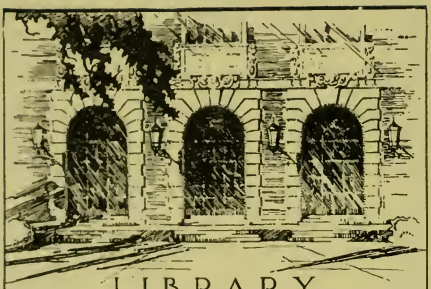

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BY

SYDNEY HODGES

AUTHOR OF

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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When Leaves were Green

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. COURTENAY BYNG.

'It is awfully good of you to come so soon, Mr. Beverley. I hope you are not very much alarmed at my request.'

'I assure you it will give me very great pleasure to carry it out.'

'And you think I shall not look perfectly hideous on canvas?'

'I think you will look quite charming. Indeed, I am sure you will.'

'Thank you. Now, do sit down. Take that chair. You will find it very comfortable.'

Glyn seated himself. The widow returned to the chair in which she had been sitting

when he arrived, one of those low, curved, fanciful-looking things which, in contradistinction to the habits of their grandmothers, the women of the present day affect. In this case the chair was so low that it almost necessitated an extension of the feet and the display of a very pretty pair of rosetted French shoes, together with a tiny portion of the silk openwork stockings, of delicate manufacture.

Mrs. Courtenay Byng was unquestionably pretty—prettier even than Glyn had before thought her. But this might be due to the fact that Blanche was not at hand now to provoke comparison. All Mrs. Byng's surroundings, too, were calculated to enhance the notion of her prettiness. The house she lived in when in town, which had been left her by her late husband, was a gem in its way—small, but perfect in all its arrangements. The drawing-room in which she received Glyn was one of the most perfect little rooms he had ever seen, full of those costly trifles with which women, either from inherent love of beauty or from the assump-

tion of it, like to surround themselves. In addition to the scraps of Dresden and Worcester, the delicate statuettes and the artistically framed photographs, flowers were scattered pretty thickly around, and a delicate perfume stole through the air, which, together with the soft, subdued light from the shaded lamps, caused the room to appear to Glyn almost a scene of enchantment.

Mrs. Byng was dressed in thoroughly good taste also. If there was an error, it was rather in the direction of display. Her dress fitted her well-rounded figure to perfection. It was cut low in front and behind, with a bordering of creamy lace, which mingled harmoniously with the delicate tints of the open neck and bust. Her hair was twisted in graceful, careless coils about her head, and just a light fringe played over her forehead, so loosely that, while it softened the outline, it did not hide the contour of the face. Mrs. Byng possessed also that somewhat unusual accompaniment of light hair, darkish eyebrows and lashes. She well knew the value of the latter, for her eyes were kept pretty

constantly on the scrap of fancy-work which she held in her dimpled hands. The occasional upraised glances necessitated by the conversation came from her blue eyes like glints of sunshine through leafage.

'And when would it suit you to make a beginning? My time is quite at your disposal.'

'It is very kind of you. I can begin at once, if you wish; say, the day after to-morrow.'

'Thanks. Will you paint it here?'

'I had not intended to do so,' said Glyn, somewhat taken aback. 'The light in my studio would be better.'

'Oh, but this wretched weather!' pleaded the widow with a little shiver. 'Surely you would not be so cruel as to drag me out every day?' and an appealing glance shot from under the eyelashes.

'Of course, if you very much wish it, I will paint here; but, if I am not mistaken, this room has a southern aspect. That would never do.'

'Oh, I do not mean exactly in this room.

I can give you a charming little room at the back, where you can do exactly as you like, and come and go quite independently.'

'Then,' said Glyn, 'I do not see that there would be any difficulty. I will send the requisite things here to-morrow. Perhaps, though, it would be as well for me to look at the room.'

'Oh, by all means; we will go at once. Would you kindly bring that candle from the piano?'

Mrs. Byng was undoubtedly a clever woman. The room to which she led the way was as perfect a little studio as if it had been arranged by Glyn himself. The curtains were removed from the window, so that there might be no obstruction of the light. The centre of the room was clear of furniture, leaving plenty of space for the easel, and for the artist to move about freely. The walls were of a sober gray-green, forming a good background for the head; and a few artistic bits of drapery were thrown carelessly about, giving a sense of colour most agreeable to the painter's eye. A few choice drawings

decorated her walls—specimens of the sensible school of art, not the productions of those who go in for what they are pleased to call Impressionism, and who give us a few dabs of white for geese, a square cottage, a visionary pump, and some more dabs to represent clothes hanging out to dry, and call that true art. Glyn, accurate though he was in his rendering of Nature, had no feeling in common with the calf and goose style of art. In Mrs. Byng's pictures he recognised gems which suited his own taste exactly, and which called forth exclamations of the purest delight.

But was he to be shut up day after day with this charming widow in this little gem of a room? In spite of his unaffected single-heartedness, this thought did cross his mind. The widow was far too shrewd, however, to throw herself at any man's head in this abrupt fashion.

'An old acquaintance of yours is coming to stay with me to-morrow,' she said.

They had returned to the drawing-room, and Glyn had again taken his place by the fire, while Mrs. Byng dispensed the tea

from an elegant little equipage by her side.

'Indeed! Who is that?' asked Glyn.

'Sib Maitland. You must remember her at Lupton. I think you used to like her.'

'I was interested in her,' said Glyn, remembering the moonlight meeting and the girl's dreamy ways. 'I shall be very pleased to see her again.'

He longed to make some inquiries respecting the Venables, as he knew Mrs. Byng had been with them a few weeks before. Something, however, restrained him. He half thought that he might betray himself; but Mrs. Byng took the initiative, and began the subject herself.

'You have not inquired for your old friends, by the way,' said she. 'I was with them a fortnight ago. They were leaving for Naples.'

'Here, then,' thought Glyn, 'is the explanation of my not having had an answer to my letter. It may not have been sent on. Are they going to stay at Naples?' he asked.

'Only for a week or two, I imagine. Captain D'Eyncourt joins them there. He has been in the East.'

Mrs. Byng's eyes were carefully shrouded beneath their lashes as she made this announcement. She did not once raise them from the work which she had now resumed.

Glyn's cup of tea was arrested half-way to his lips.

'Captain D'Eyncourt!' he exclaimed.

His tone was more than that of surprise; there was a touch of vexation in it.

'Yes. There is nothing wonderful in that, is there? So old a friend.'

'No; I suppose not,' said Glyn, coming to his senses again. 'I was surprised, because I thought Miss Venables did not quite like him.'

'You thought so?'

'Well, yes. She gave me that idea.'

'Did she say so?'

'No, she would hardly have done that—at least, not to me, a comparative stranger.'

'You saw a good deal of each other at Lupton, and—in Cornwall.'

'Yes; but she would hardly have imparted to me her likes and dislikes.'

'I don't see why she should not if she had them. You know she was in love with Captain D'Eyncourt once on a time?'

'I have heard so,' said Glyn, with the uncomfortable twinge he always felt when this subject crossed his mind.

Mrs. Byng held up her work to the light, and placed it at various angles to get the effect.

'Isn't it a little difficult to eradicate a deep feeling of that kind when once it is implanted?' she said.

'I should certainly have thought so myself,' answered Glyn, feeling more and more uncomfortable.

'I don't think Blanche a very changeable sort of person. I should think with her "Love is love for evermore,"' said Glyn's torturer.

'On the other hand, I think if Miss Venables once found real cause for disliking a man, she would never get to like him again,' said Glyn.

'You think she had cause to dislike him?'

'That was my impression. Else why was the engagement broken off?'

'That is one of the mysteries of the female heart which is yet to be unravelled; but whatever Blanche may think, there is no doubt that Sir Percy dotes on him. Now, would you not like some music? I shall not venture to sing after Sib comes, for she will cut me out altogether, so you must make the most of me to-night. By the way, I have always had an idea that Sib was very much taken with the gallant D'Eyncourt. All the women seem in love with him. I shall have to follow suit myself, only I don't like a black moustache and whiskers.'

Had the fascinating widow purposely upset Glyn's mind? He went home that night in anything but a happy mood. In spite of himself, the thought of Blanche and D'Eyncourt together in the sunny South grated on his mind to an extent he did not like to admit even to himself; but then the remembrance of that parting in the studio

came back to him, and the tears, forcing themselves from under the quivering lids.

'Whatever may happen, I cannot think her a hypocrite,' said honest Glyn.

With that he went to bed, but lay awake half the night, thinking of his disappointment at the Academy; of his disappointment about the Italian trip, and the struggles of life generally. The pleasant little widow and her commission was the only bright spot in his mind that night. It would, at least, be a diversion to his gloomy thoughts to be going often to a house where he would be so well employed and so warmly received.

CHAPTER XX.

AT THE GROSVENOR.

'Don't put out your colours to-day, Mr. Beverley. Sib insists upon your taking us to the Grosvenor. I know you are sensitive about going to the Academy. They have treated you shamefully, but never mind, you may be on the line next year.'

Glyn was reluctant to give up a day's work, but the pretty widow was not to be disobeyed, and, after all, a man might indulge in a worse occupation than that of escorting two fair women to a London exhibition in the height of the season. So Glyn cast a lingering look at his picture, which was growing apace, and then went down and

took his place in the brougham with Mrs. Byng and Miss Maitland.

Sib was looking pretty much the same as when Glyn first met her. Placid people do not vary much in outward aspect. It struck Glyn, when they first met in Bruton Street, that she was looking a shade more careworn, but that might have been merely an impression.

Glyn was proud of his companions. They were both well dressed, the close-fitting fashion of the day revealing Mrs. Byng's well-rounded figure and Sib's slim gracefulness to perfection. The former's roseate hue formed a complete contrast to the even paleness of the latter. But there was still the same indefinable charm about Sib, which attracts one more than actual prettiness.

Glyn wanted diversion. He was still smarting under his rejection. It was the first thought in the morning and the last at night. As he had been hung on two or three former occasions, it was, if anything, worse to bear, for, of course, the first question everybody asked him was, 'What have

you in the Academy this year?' and it was a perpetual re-opening of the wound to have to answer, 'Nothing.'

In a few minutes they reached the gilded halls of the Grosvenor. In mounting the steps, Glyn heard an exclamation from Mrs. Byng, and the next moment she was shaking hands with an elderly man, who was bent on the same errand as themselves.

'This is charming,' said Mrs. Byng. 'You will be able to point out all the best things to us, Mr. Barker. You know Miss Maitland, I think. Let me introduce an artist friend of mine—Mr. Beverley.'

'Delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Beverley. Beverley, Beverley. You had a picture in the Academy last year, or the year before, if I am not mistaken?'

'I had,' said Glyn, feeling flattered at the thought that his work was familiar to a stranger.

'Remember it very well. Nice feeling about it. Refinement. What so many artists want in the present day. What have you there this year?'

'I'm sorry to say I'm turned out.'

Glyn felt quite sure that in making this announcement he would at once go down fifty per cent. in the estimation of his questioner. He was agreeably disappointed, however.

'Turned out, eh? Ah, well, you're in good company. Scott and Wilkens and Brown are all out—all good men, too. Saw their pictures before they went in. Would have bet five hundred to one on their getting a good place. All a toss-up, sir. All a toss-up for outsiders. If a picture happens to fit, up it goes; if it doesn't, down it comes. Can't blame 'em. Eleven thousand pictures sent in this year. What the deuce are they to do?'

Glyn felt consoled, and looked closely at his consoler. He was a man of about fifty or fifty-five; tall, stoutish, inclined to be gray, and with a quick, intelligent, restless eye which savoured of eccentricity, and seemed to take in everything at a glance. His features were still strikingly handsome, and he wore the look and tone of a man who had lived much

on the sunny side of life, and amid its most brilliant and stirring scenes.

Few men indeed had passed through more varied and vivid experiences than Reginald Barker. He came into a good estate at the death of his father, now some thirty years since. He had distinguished himself at Eton and at Oxford; but having no particular ambition, no incentive to exertion arising from lack of means, and being somewhat of a sybarite by nature, he had forborne to follow up his scholastic successes by the adoption of any profession. He was, however, in no sense an idle man. He cultivated the refinements of life and its pleasures, with an assiduity which would have gained him distinction in more arduous paths. He travelled much. He became the friend of the learned and great in whatever country he visited. He was an enthusiast in music, an actual student in art for a time. Ary Scheffer had been his bosom friend, and if art could have enchained him as a votary, the attractions of the renowned painter's studio would have induced him to make painting the occupation of his

life. As it was, he gained enough of technical skill to enable him to discern the difficulties of art, and to become an able critic, in which capacity his perfect acquaintance with the works of the great masters did him good service. He threw off in a bold, impetuous style several articles on the subject of ancient and modern art, which created quite a furore at the time, and if he could have been constant to one thing, he might have attained a high position in literature. But the incentive was wanting, and he relapsed again into the man of fashion—the brilliant talker at the dinner-table.

His reputation was such, however, that a young art aspirant would tremble at his censure and rejoice unspeakably at his praise. He was strong in his likes and dislikes; his censure was dashed with sarcasm, though never ill-naturedly so. On the other hand, his praise was enthusiastic when it came, but that was rarely. Although he had never married, and had now passed the meridian of life, his admiration of beauty was

as strong as ever. It is not unnatural, therefore, that Laura Byng should be numbered among his friends.

'This is the very man you ought to know,' said Mrs. Byng in an undertone, as Mr. Barker was exchanging a few commonplaces with Sib Maitland. 'He will talk about you everywhere if he likes your pictures, and it seems he does. That was great praise from him.'

Glyn had heard of the renowned virtuoso, and was glad to make his acquaintance, although he was sensible enough to know that a man cannot make a sound reputation by means of patrons. They are useful adjuncts on the road to fame, but the fame itself must, after all, be founded on the opinions of one's compeers, otherwise the foundation is rotten and the building will fall. Neither patrons nor the press can bolster up a man for any prolonged period unless he has in him what the Yankees call 'the real grit.'

'I wish you could see Mr. Beverley's pictures, Mr. Barker. I am sure you would like them,' said Mrs. Byng.

'I shall be charmed to come and see them. Where shall I find you?'

Glyn gave his address.

'I will come to-morrow, if I may. I am an idle man, and it will give me much pleasure. But, mind you, I shall say exactly what I think. I liked the picture I saw. You see I have remembered it.'

'I always like a candid opinion from anyone who really understands art. It is the criticisms of conceited ignorance that are so trying.'

'Exactly. Well, you may expect me to-morrow. What shall we say—four o'clock? If you are not better engaged, and will come back and dine with me at my club, I shall be very glad of your company.'

'Thanks, very much. I shall be very pleased to do so.'

'We will so arrange it, then. Now, ladies brace up your nerves for strong doses of the allegorical, the poetical, and the fantastic. This is the gallery where extremes meet. We have nothing more poetical than Albert Moore, or more fantastic than Whistler.'

CHAPTER XXI.

CRITICISM.

Mr. Reginald Barker was punctual to his appointment. Having nothing to do, there was no reason why he should not be. Yet it is usually your idle men who are the most unpunctual.

'Aha! my dear young friend Blanche Venables!' he exclaimed, as he caught sight of the picture on the easel. 'A capital likeness, too. Her very look and expression.'

'I am so glad you think so,' quoth gratified Glyn.

'You are a lucky fellow to get such a subject! A peerless girl that, and the prettiest I ever knew in my life. So clever, too! Like her mother. There was a woman to be remembered! Did you ever see the

picture in which Scheffer introduced her mother's face?'

'Yes, often. It is a picture I admire beyond anything.'

'How well I remember the time! I was with them when Scheffer first saw her. I shall never forget the way his face lighted up. She seemed to come on him like a revelation. When did you paint this picture?'

'At Lupton last summer. I was down there for some weeks.'

Mr. Barker had seated himself before the picture and was scrutinizing it closely. There was a long silence.

'And they have sent this back, have they?' the critic said at length.

'Yes.'

'Now, shall I say what I think?'

'I am always glad of a sincere opinion.'

'You must not think me hard. I like the picture. You have caught the likeness wonderfully. The colour is good and expression charming. But I must confess I do not think it is as good as the picture you had in the Academy.'

This was a blow to Glyn, who had put all his soul into the picture.

'What is it you don't like?' he asked.

'It is difficult to say. I don't think I could point out any special fault; but it does not appear to me to be painted with the same force and freedom as the other—of course, speaking from recollection. Possibly you have been too anxious over this.'

'I think that very likely. With such a subject, I wished to make it my best picture.'

'No doubt; and that very fact made you work timidly. With your sister, now, you probably felt that it was immaterial whether you succeeded or not. Hence the greater freedom of handling. I confess I think that the finer work, and the Council probably thought so, too. It is, no doubt, very disappointing, but you must not think me hard, or the Council either.'

'But they hung me so well the year before last. In the second room, close to the line,' remonstrated Glyn.

'Very possibly; but it does not follow that you will be hung year after year. Very

few outsiders are. You must take your chance with the rest. Would you be surprised to hear that I once had a picture hung? "One swallow does not make a summer," you know.'

All this was not encouraging. Glyn felt depressed, and his visitor saw it.

'There is not the slightest reason why you should be disheartened,' he said. 'You have the feeling and talent to take a leading place by-and-by. Have you studied much in the foreign galleries?'

'Very little, with the exception of the Louvre, and the Belgian and Dutch galleries.'

'You should try and see more of them. It is astonishing what an advantage it is. Look at Crichton, for instance. Fancy the advantages he had! He studied at Dresden, Rome, and Paris, getting every advantage a student can possibly have. The best works of all ages before him, and advice from the best artists living. Under these circumstances, a man is bound to excel, if he has any talent at all. Take, again, the case of young Conway. He, too, studied in Italy, the chosen home of

the arts. His father was a clever painter, so he had all the advantages of his advice, and they engaged the best nude painter of the day to paint a figure in his studio. Why, my dear sir, under these circumstances, a man learns more in an hour than he can find out for himself in a year—more tricks of execution and arrangement, I mean. Of course, he must have brains; but, then, no man without them has a chance as a painter.'

'But take the case of Opie and Lawrence,' said Glyn.

'Quite exceptional geniuses. Early developed talent. But of course we don't know to what extent even they might have benefited by early academic study. Besides, Lawrence was studying at the Academy at eighteen. After all, they can hardly be called great. What is this? A landscape of yours?' he added, turning suddenly to the picture Glyn had painted in the woods at Lupton.

'Yes. It was one I painted last summer,' answered Glyn, with a sigh of regret over the dead past.

'Very charming it is, too. Full of Nature indeed. You have evidently a talent for landscape. I can only say, "Go on and prosper." But I should certainly recommend you to go abroad for a bit, and see what other painters are doing. I can give you plenty of introductions.'

Glyn felt the value of the advice, but how was it to be accomplished? He was too heavily weighted with his mother and sister on his hands. Strive as he would, he could only just make enough for their humble expenses. Where could he get the time and means for foreign travel?

'By the way,' said Mr. Barker, 'I had forgotten when I asked you to dine that I have a card for Lady Courtland's reception to-night. Would you care to go? I will take you with much pleasure. We can dine quietly at the club, and go there afterwards. I think you would enjoy it. You will meet some remarkable people.'

'I should like it of all things,' said Glyn.

'I shall expect you at the club at half-past seven, then. Come as much earlier as you

like. You can look over the papers. I congratulate you on your portrait of Blanche Venables. An excellent likeness. By the way, where are the Venables now? Have you heard of them lately?'

'The last I heard of them was that they were at Naples. Captain D'Eyncourt was to join them there.'

'D'Eyncourt, eh? What's he doing there? I thought that affair was all broken off.'

'I believe it is, as far as Miss Venables is concerned.'

'D'Eyncourt is a deuce of a fellow to stick to a thing when once he has made up his mind. He is not easily shaken off. But he won't do for Blanche. I hope to Heaven she won't throw herself away! Well, *au revoir*.'

Glyn enjoyed his dinner with Reginald Barker vastly. A chat with a man of such varied experiences could not fail to be interesting. The dinner, too, was excellent, for Barker prided himself upon doing everything well, and he gave Glyn as *recherché* a little feast as he would have given to a duke. Herein spoke the true gentleman.

Later on they departed for the reception at Lady Courtland's, where, for the first time, Glyn rubbed shoulders with some of the most distinguished men in art, science, and literature. In the thick of the crowd a certain well-known tragedian was surrounded by a bevy of admirers of both sexes.

'He seems quite the lion of the evening,' said Glyn.

'It shows what a position a man may attain by diligent study of his profession, and by an earnest desire to elevate his art,' said Mr. Barker.

'Yes; but he must have genius.'

'Of course he must have genius; but all the genius in the world will not help him to a social position if he degrades his art, or neglects it.'

There was a certain significance in the last words which caused Glyn to lay them to heart. Perhaps his new friend had uttered them with that object, and with the recollection of the pretty widow's demands on the artist's time.

CHAPTER XXII.

STROKES OF FATE.

Escorting pretty women to exhibitions, dining at clubs, and finishing the evening at grand entertainments, may serve to divert the thoughts for a time, but the reaction must set in. When Glyn awoke the next morning, his troubles came back to him with renewed force. The criticisms of Mr. Barker, the perpetual references to D'Eyncourt and Blanche, and, added to this, his disappointment at the Academy, all tended to depress him terribly. Even what he had witnessed at Lady Courtland's made him feel what a vast gulf there was between himself and those who had gained the highest honours in their various callings. What years of patient labour must pass before he, too, could

command the homage of the great and wealthy. Weighted as he was, he doubted if the time would ever come. His previous success at the Academy had given him a false estimate of himself. His new friend had dashed to pieces his hopes of the short-cut to fame in which he had before indulged, and which the warm praises of Blanche and her father had naturally fostered.

In the midst of his despondent musings a tap came at his door, and his sister spoke outside.

'Are you awake, Glyn?'

'Yes; come in.'

She entered. Glyn saw at once that something was amiss.

'What's the matter, Kate? You look as pale as a ghost.'

'Dear mamma is very ill. I have scarcely had any rest all night. I want you to see her. I think she should have a doctor.'

'What is the matter with her?'

'I don't know; she is so weak she can hardly sit up, and seems so terribly distressed.'

'I will come directly.'

He dressed hastily, and followed his sister to his mother's room. The old lady lay half unconscious, moaning feebly.

Glyn took her hand. It was hot and dry, and lay quite listlessly in his own.

'Why, mother, what is the matter?' he said.

'I don't know,' she answered feebly. 'I feel so very, very ill; I think it has been too much for me—all this trouble.'

'You must not give way to it, mother,' Glyn answered. 'Something has gone wrong with you. I will get a doctor.'

'No; I don't think it is any use,' moaned the invalid. 'Besides, the expense.'

'Oh, hang the expense! We must set you right somehow. A little medicine will be the thing. Keep quiet for the present.'

He kissed her and went on his errand. The doctor soon arrived. He went through the usual formula of tongue and pulse, and put a few questions. Then he seemed puzzled, and took Glyn aside.

'Has she had any great shock lately?'

'Well, yes, she has. She lost a lot of money in the Underwood smash.'

'And has been fretting ever since?'

'It is probable, but she has not said much.'

'It is utter prostration of the nervous system. It may lead to serious results unless immediate steps are taken.'

'What steps?'

'Well, first, change of air and scene. Something to divert her mind, and then tonics. Can you not get her away somewhere—say to the seaside?'

'I suppose it might be managed,' said Glyn, feeling, at the same time, the dreadful difficulties in his way. 'In fact, it must be, if it is necessary.'

'I think it is absolutely necessary. It is the best advice I can give you; she will probably rally quickly with change. Without it there may be danger of a seizure at her age.'

The doctor went his way.

Glyn sat down to think over this new dilemma.

'What on earth can be done?' he said.

'The dear old lady must be got away, whatever happens.'

He called his sister, and told her what the doctor advised.

'Another burthen on you, Glyn. How I wish I could do something to help you; I am only an encumbrance.'

'You are my only comfort at present, Kate. What could mother do without you? I could not take her away. Let us be thankful you are here to do so. I must look out for some place, and try and get you off as soon as she rallies a little.'

'And you will be left here alone.'

'Oh, I must make the best of that. Besides,' he added, with a grim sort of laugh, 'I dare say Mrs. Byng will take pity on me. I shall be there a good deal.'

His sister looked at him anxiously, and a question half rose to her lips. She, however, restrained it, probably considering that he had enough to trouble him at present.

'I think Folkestone would be a good place,' he continued. 'I'll write to Duncan. He lives there, you know. I dare say he

can tell us something about lodgings, and as it is no great distance, I could run down myself from Saturday to Monday.'

He said this to put a good face on the matter, but the chief problem in his mind was how he was to raise the money to pay for his mother and sister. A change for him was an impossibility. He must push on Mrs. Byng's portrait, and become a money-grubber instead of an aspirant for fame. It was a bitter thought, but the iron hand of circumstance was heavy upon him, and there was no help for it.

He wrote to his friend at Folkestone to beg for early information respecting lodgings, and after paying another visit to his mother, who was in the same lethargic state, he started for his appointment with Mrs. Byng. He found her still at the breakfast-table.

'We are late this morning,' the widow said apologetically. 'The fact is, Sib has been a little upset by some news from the Venables. I felt sure my surmise about her was correct.'

'What surmise?'

'That she was fond of Captain D'Eyncourt.'

'But what is the news that has upset her?' Glyn asked, with a vague apprehension of new troubles at his heart.

'Only that Blanche is going to marry Captain D'Eyncourt.'

The widow's eyes sank lower than usual as she made this announcement, so that she did not see the deadly pallor which made Glyn look as if he had been struck by death.

There was silence in the room for some seconds. Then Glyn repeated hoarsely:

'That she is going to marry Captain D'Eyncourt?'

'Yes,' answered the widow, taking up the morning paper in an unconcerned way. 'I told you I thought she would. I don't see anything extraordinary in it.'

Glyn was grasping the back of a chair. He felt sick and giddy. He was beyond the thought of endeavouring to conceal what he felt, but the widow would not see it. The situation was becoming embarrassing to her.

'There is the letter, if you care to see it,' she said.

She pointed to where it lay upon the breakfast-table, but still she did not look at Glyn. His eyes turned towards that little parallelogram of blue foreign paper which had produced this horrible turmoil in his brain. He saw the well-known handwriting of the woman he loved beyond all the world. Mechanically, his hand went out towards it.

Had he looked at the widow at that moment, he would have seen the pallor of his own cheek reflected in hers, for a deadly sickness was at her heart.

His hand dropped to his side.

'No,' he said, in a despairing tone; 'the announcement is enough. I do not want the details.'

Mrs. Byng rose.

'You will excuse me for a few minutes, Mr. Beverley,' she said. 'I want to give some orders.'

She went towards the door, taking the letter up as she passed. Mechanically Glyn closed the door behind her. Then he sank

down on a couch with a great groan, and buried his face in his hands.

'Oh, my God, my God!'

That was his cry, wrung from the utter desolation of his heart—the death of all his hopes.

He sat with bowed head, minute after minute, striving to stifle the horrible pain that was gnawing at his heart.

All this time the widow stood outside the door, listening.

Presently he rose up. His cheeks were burning, and his head throbbing as if it would burst. He went to the window and looked out. The hot sunlight seemed to scorch him, and he turned away with the sickness of despair.

He passed towards the door with a heavy stride. His footsteps were a signal to the widow. She opened the door at the moment and came in.

'How ill you are looking!' she said with a glance of well-assumed surprise. 'You have had some vexation this morning. I saw it when you came in.'

'I *have* had some vexation. I *do* feel ill —very ill. The fact is, my mother is in a very bad way. It was foolish of me to come. Do you mind my putting off the sitting this morning?'

'Not in the least. Pray don't let that distress you. Will you come back by-and-by and dine? Perhaps Sib will be better.'

'If she is suffering the tortures that I am, she won't be,' Glyn thought, but he only said:

'Not to-day, thanks, I have so much to do. Good-bye.'

To get away from the house and out into the air—far away from the sickly streets—that was his one thought.

The widow heard the door slam after him. Then she went to the drawing-room, sat down on one of her low chairs, and gave a long sigh.

'Have I gone too far?' she said in a questioning tone. 'Good heavens! if he had read this letter and suspected. But it was worth the risk. He cannot now suspect.'

She took another letter from her pocket, tore them both up into small pieces, and threw the fragments into the waste-paper basket.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ANNETTE'S MANŒUVRES.

Mrs. Courtenay Byng sat for a good half-hour after Glyn's departure, with her arms folded and her eyes downcast. She was evidently revolving many things in her mind, and was to some extent troubled. Presently her thoughts assumed a definite shape, and she rose up.

'Yes; I will go at once and see if what he said was true.'

She rang the bell. The single man-servant of the establishment appeared in answer to the summons.

'Briggs, tell Annette I want her.'

In a few minutes Annette appeared. She was Mrs. Byng's own maid, and, like her

mistress, was very pretty. The widow's liking for pretty things extended even to her maids.

Annette merits some description. She was not French, although she looked as if she were. She had a pair of restless black eyes, a short *retroussé* nose, and well-shaped, but thin lips. There was also a suspicion of powder. Her manner and even her speech were foreign, but this was an affectation arising from the fact that she had lived a good deal in service abroad.

'Annette, tell Miss Maitland I am going out, and may not be back for some hours. Say I am sorry to leave her, but the business is important. Be sure you take great care of her.'

'Yes, ma'am.'

Mrs. Byng felt that she had caused quite sufficient consternation for one morning. She did not care to see Sib Maitland at present, and she judged, perhaps rightly, that Sib would prefer being alone. So she attired herself carefully—the emergency must indeed be great which caused her to neglect

her dress—and then sallied forth to call on Glyn's sister.

Glyn had not returned. Kate Beverley, who had been sitting by her mother's bedside, came down.

'Your brother tells me that you are very anxious about your mother. I hope it is nothing serious.'

'I fear it is serious, from what the doctor says. We are to get her away as soon as possible.'

'I am deeply grieved to hear it. Where do you propose taking her?'

'That is the difficulty. We hardly know. Glyn has written to a friend at Folkestone about lodgings; but we know so little about these things, and unfortunately Glyn cannot leave town.'

'And you do not like going alone?'

'I don't mind that. Only we shall have to leave Glyn alone.'

The widow saw her opportunity. 'Can I be of any use to you?' she said. 'I know of so many nice lodgings at the seaside.'

'I am afraid they would be too expensive

for us,' answered Kate, with a little smile. 'We cannot afford very much, you know.'

A sudden bright thought came into Mrs. Byng's mind.

'My dear, I know of the very thing to suit you. An old servant of mine who lived with me when Mr. Byng was alive has a nice house at Brighton. It is near the sea and in a quiet part. I am sure I could arrange with her to take you on very reasonable terms. Will you leave it to me?'

'I cannot actually decide without consulting Glyn. It is very good of you to help us. I should think he would be only too glad.'

The idea once formed, Mrs. Byng, with her usual energy, was anxious to carry it out.

'I think I shall take the responsibility on myself,' she said. 'Tell your brother not to decide on anything until he hears from me. I shall see him in the morning. I have no doubt I can arrange something in the meantime. I do hope your mother will soon be better.'

The widow hastened home, and put on a travelling dress. A cab was summoned,

and within half an hour she was in the train, on her way to Brighton.

Apart from her desire to do a good-natured action, she had another object in view. Glyn, alone in town, would be thrown pretty much on her hands. It was but natural to suppose that he would prefer the society of herself and Sib to solitary musings in his own home. He would feel infinitely grateful, too, for having the trouble of finding lodgings taken off his hands. Altogether, things were working exactly as she wished. She was sorry for poor Mrs. Beverley's illness, but even that helped matters on in what Mrs. Byng considered the right direction.

Now, when the widow departed the second time from the house, the pretty maid Annette set about a task which was a favourite one with her whenever she found an opportunity. She allowed half an hour to pass, so that her mistress might get clear away. She then went to the drawing-room, and, under pretence of dusting the things on the writing-table, and the little knick-knacks about the room, she commenced a careful inspection of

the various documents pertaining to her mistress which were scattered pretty freely about.

Annette perused the several notes and letters with varying expression, but without any unusual amount of interest. Apparently they were of a commonplace character. She did not hit upon evidences of new flirtations or awkward liaisons. This was disappointing, and Annette expressed the same in her features. Proofs of pretty frequent intercourse with Glyn were of course abundant, but this was, to a great extent, necessitated by his present occupation. It was, moreover, an admitted fact that the widow liked the painter. She made no attempt to disguise it. Annette completed her inspection of the notes on the table. She even held up the blotting-book leaf by leaf to the looking-glass over the mantelpiece, and, as the widow wrote a fairly bold hand, a good deal of her correspondence was revealed by the treacherous leaves when reflected in the glass. Still, the black-eyed maid was hardly rewarded for her trouble.

She was casting a lingering look about the room, prior to taking her departure, when her eyes fell upon the waste-paper basket, wherein were the fragments of the letter Mrs. Byng had torn up after Glyn's departure. The maid's eyes lighted up in a moment.

'The idea of my forgetting that!' she exclaimed.

The next moment she was on her knees, carefully picking out the minute bits of paper her mistress had thrown away. There were fragments of two different tints in the basket. On the one colour was the delicate tracery of a woman's hand, on the other the bolder characters of a man's. Annette gathered up the scattered fragments of both. There were no torn letters in the basket except these two, so there was not much difficulty in collecting them.

Selecting one or two of the larger fragments, Annette read the words and portions of words traced upon them. Among those written in the man's hand were the following: 'very careful how,' 'see the le,' 'suspicion,'

'on tab,' 'led artist.' It was evident Annette could not gain much from this. She turned to the finer writing; 'very soon,' 'a love match,' 'did love,' 'earliest informati,' 'future welfare,' were the words which first met her eye. Evidently there was matter of deeper interest here than Annette had yet encountered. She took an envelope from the case, and, carefully gathering together the fragments, placed them all in it, and left the room with the envelope in her pocket.

Annette had made up her mind to a nice little morning's amusement—one, indeed, that she had indulged in on more than one previous occasion. To carry out her plans effectually, however, she must have time. She proceeded first to Miss Maitland's door, and tapped lightly.

A feeble voice murmured, 'Who is there?'

'It is I, miss, if you please'—Annette prided herself on her correct grammar—'I came to see if you wanted anything.'

'No, thanks. My head is still very bad. I think I will remain quiet for an hour or two.'

If Sib had said 'heart' instead of 'head,' it would have been more strictly true, but this did not concern Annette. She felt that she had a respite for a considerable time, so she pursued her way to her own room at the top of the house, and sat down at her own table, having previously locked the door.

Then she took from a drawer a sheet of very transparent paper and a bottle of gum, and drew the envelope containing the fragments from her pocket. After carefully sorting the lighter from the darker blue fragments, and placing them in separate heaps on the table by her side, she took the fragments with the even cut outer edge of the paper and placed them on the right, and the fragments with the fold, which indicated the division of the sheet, on the left. Then she selected the top edges and the bottom edges, and with careful and elaborate scrutiny arranged them as nearly in order as she could. Having proceeded so far, she took the scrap representing the left-hand upper corner of the first page, which contained no writing on the front, and, covering it with a

thin coat of gum, placed it carefully on the sheet of tissue-paper, through which she could see the writing on the other side. This process she repeated as she found the successive pieces which fitted the first page.

It was an intricate and wearying puzzle, but Annette was persevering. To the disentanglement of a secret, especially an intrigue, she would have devoted half a lifetime, had it been necessary. She sat for more than an hour over her fragments. As the jagged-edged rhomboids, triangles, and parallelograms gradually and surely assumed shape, and the writing upon them followed, word after word, in regular succession, Annette's interest increased. A chance word here and there whetted her curiosity to the highest pitch, but she restrained herself. Not until her task was complete would she indulge in a regular perusal of the lines which now lay before her. The letter in the woman's hand was complete, word for word and line for line. The man's was growing towards completion, and as it grew, Annette's face became quite feverish in her

anxiety to master the whole of the contents. She restrained herself, however, until the last fragment was fitted in, down to the very signature. Then she sat back with a sigh of relief, and with the consciousness of having achieved a great work—as indeed it was, to a woman of Annette's limited capacity.

In a few minutes she took up the letters one by one, and read them from beginning to end. The lady's bore the signature of Blanche Venables, the gentleman's that of George D'Eyncourt. Annette put them down with an expression that was almost wicked for so pretty a girl.

'So, Captain D'Eyncourt, that's your little game, is it? I'll take the liberty of putting these letters by. They may be useful when the smash comes.'

Annette opened a large box which stood in one corner of the room. Taking therefrom a smaller box, she unlocked it with a key which was on a bunch she carried in her pocket. She placed the letters in it, carefully relocked it, and put it back in its place, locking the larger one as well. Then she

went downstairs, quite contented with the result of her morning's work, the issues of which were destined to be more momentous than even she had anticipated.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GLYN'S WANDERINGS.

When Glyn left the widow's house he started off at a quick pace through the streets without the least idea whither he was going. The necessity for rapid motion was his one thought. Some of us at least have known that state of extreme perturbation of spirit when action is the only relief; when stillness and inactivity almost make the brain reel, and you feel that you must go on, on, if you would keep Reason on her throne. It is a state of mind, happily, that does not come often—perhaps not more than once or twice in a lifetime; but it is not a pleasant thing to look back upon even after long years.

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So Glyn went on mile after mile with rapid strides—heedless of the passers-by, heedless of where he was going. Everything but the one burning thought was completely driven from his mind, and that seemed to rend his brain. D'Eyncourt of all people! The man he thought she despised. A man utterly false and shallow, he knew. What was he about with that girl, Sib Maitland? There was some mystery attached to that, which must be cleared up before this could be allowed to go on. He would bring him to book himself, and charge him with falsehood and treachery to his very face.

This was all very well, we know, but how was he to do it? He had not yet arrived at this stage in his reflections. He had not considered what right he had to interfere, or, indeed, how he could do so, considering they were in Italy and he in England. A letter certainly might do it; but, then, on the face of it, it would have been more than an absurdity for him to have upset any family arrangement of this kind; one, moreover, which was sanctioned by Blanche's father, and was only

the renewal of a former engagement. But, as before said, Glyn had not yet reached this stage. That was to come after. At present indignation strong and fierce had gripped him hard, and had he been able at that moment to confront D'Eyncourt, or even Blanche, probably emotion might have got the better of discretion. It is a good thing that circumstances do not always give us the chance of yielding to our first impulses.

Glyn walked many a mile that morning. He had instinctively, as it were, set out on his usual route towards Hampstead, but a new and racking thought came into his head when he had got half-way there. He remembered his last walk in that direction, and how he had sat down on the Heath facing the South, and let his thoughts wander away to the sunny clime where Blanche was still sojourning, and how the thought of her had soothed his spirit as he gazed into the dim distance.

Now the thought was madness—the spot would be hateful to him. He turned suddenly and walked back again into the town, mingling

with the crowds of men each intent upon his own joy or sorrow, and taking no heed of the stalwart young man, walking at a great pace, who seemed to think that all was over for him in this life; that the sun could never shine for him again; that Nature could never again spread out her glorious book before him and say, 'Behold, here is joy untold! Come to me, and I will give you endless peace and happiness—endless beauty, infinite variety.'

Suddenly Glyn paused in his walk. A thought flashed across his mind like a gleam of light. He went on again at greater speed than before towards the widow's house.

'What if she is mistaken, or has read the letter wrongly? What a fool I was not to read it myself!'

This was his new hope, his new reflection. In a very few minutes he reached the house, and rapped violently — so violently that Annette, who had not long completed her guilty task, leaped almost out of her skirts at the thought that it might be her mistress.

Briggs appeared, and Glyn was passing

in as usual. Briggs stopped him with a word.

'Mrs. Byng is not at home, sir.'

'Not at home—oh! Will she be long?'

'I think she will, sir. I heard her tell the coachman to drive to Victoria Station.'

Glyn paused a moment.

'Oh, no matter,' he said. 'I only want to get something from the drawing-room.'

He had a vague hope—a foolish one, of course—that the letter might have been left on Mrs. Byng's favourite writing-table. He was on sufficiently intimate terms, at any rate, to look. He was up the stairs in three bounds. He found the writing-table in a painfully neat condition, thanks to Annette's tender care. He even glanced at the waste-paper basket, but, thanks to Annette again, there was not a vestige of the letter to be seen. If we could only convey speech to inanimate things, what wonderful secrets would come to light! What a tale that waste-paper basket could have told to Glyn that morning!

He retraced his steps downstairs, and

went into the dining-room. Not a vestige of the letter there. Indeed, he had seen Mrs. Byng take it with her when she left the room. A new thought struck him. Sib Maitland had probably seen it. She would remember the contents. He would try and see her. And yet, would it not seem strange to exhibit to her such an extreme anxiety about this letter? He did not care for that. Something must be done to allay this racking heartache. He rang the bell. Briggs appeared.

'Is Miss Maitland still in her room?'

'Yes, sir, I believe so.'

'Could I send a message to her?'

'I'll see, sir.'

Briggs left the room, and held a consultation with Annette. Then he returned.

'Miss Maitland is not at all well, sir, and particularly requested that she might not be disturbed.'

'Oh, very well.'

Glyn felt that he was destined to be defeated. Besides, after all, it was very improbable that there could have been any

mistake about a letter which had had such a disastrous effect on Sib. He did not like to relinquish the new-formed hope, slight as it was. At the same time, he saw the folly of indulging in it. What was he to do? Where go? He could not return home, to sit hour after hour in a sick-house indulging in his miserable thoughts. He could not wander unceasingly about the streets.

'Good heavens! what a wretched piece of business is this life!' he cried. 'Why on earth are we born, if we are to be tossed about and racked like this?'

Suddenly a new thought came to him. He would go to Folkestone himself, and try and arrange this new business of getting lodgings for his mother. It would at least expedite matters for her, and he would thus find some distraction to his thoughts, and be doing some good. His grief made him reckless of expense. Troubles are always comparative. His anxiety about money had been entirely absorbed in the grief about Blanche.

He sent a hasty line to his sister to explain

why he did not return, and started for the station. Luckily, he found an express train about to start, and was soon on his way.

There is nothing like a quick journey by rail as a corrective to perturbation of spirit. The rapid motion, the ever-changing aspects of Nature, the fresh air blowing in through the open window, the bustle of the stations, the coming and going of fellow-passengers, all tend to divert the mind from one's immediate woes, and, no matter how keen the anguish may be, one is bound to throw it off to some extent.

By the time Glyn had reached Folkestone, the feverish agitation which had beset him in town was almost gone. Calm resolve had taken the place of vain jobations against his fate. His luck was still against him, however, for he found that the friend he hoped to see was away. He set to work, nevertheless, and soon had his pocket filled with cards of lodging-houses, upon which he made notes with regard to terms, so that he might consult his sister on his return. Then he took a turn over the Lees, and followed the path as

far as Sandgate, and saw the evening light dying away in a golden glory over the low promontory of Dungeness; and this caused his thoughts to travel still further west, until he very nearly became a wreck again over the memories of Cornwall, and that never-to-be-forgotten trip to the Land's End, with all its glories of sea and rock and feathery foam.

So he retraced his steps quickly, and, going to the most suitable lodging-house he had seen, told the people he would telegraph to them finally in the morning, and then he wended his way back to the station, and took the first train to town.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BLACK-FLOWING RIVER.

Mrs. Courtenay Byng arranged matters quite comfortably at Brighton. Her old servant's rooms were happily vacant, and she would be only too pleased to accommodate any friends of her former mistress. Then, quite confidentially, Mrs. Byng arranged with her to charge a much lower sum for the rooms than she usually received, she herself undertaking to make up the difference.

Congratulating herself on this diplomatic move, Mrs. Byng returned to town, entertaining, like the immortal Scrooge, an improved opinion of herself. It was late in the afternoon when she reached Victoria,

but she secured a hansom, and drove at once to Mrs. Beverley's.

On hearing that Mrs. Byng had returned, Kate came down, bearing a somewhat better report of her mother.

The widow explained what she had done, and if she had looked for no other reward, the expression of relief in Kate's face would have been quite a sufficient one.

'It is really too kind of you,' said Kate. 'I am sure it will be the greatest possible relief to poor Glyn, for he has been terribly worried lately.'

'I know it,' answered the widow. 'I am only too glad to help him. Besides, I have a selfish motive in view. If he is so worried, my portrait will suffer. To work well, an artist should have a calm mind.'

'I am afraid very few have,' answered Kate; 'but of course it is very desirable.'

'Well, then, you will tell your brother that it is all arranged, and I shall hope to see him in the morning.'

'Yes, certainly. I really don't know how to thank you. But do let me get you

some tea! You must be tired after your journey.'

'No, thanks. I must not stay a moment longer. I have left Sib alone all day, and she was by no means well this morning. She will wonder what has become of me.'

She said good-bye, and hastened away; but a surprise awaited her on reaching Bruton Street. In answer to her inquiry as to how Miss Maitland was, Briggs informed her that she was gone out.

'Gone out!' exclaimed Mrs. Byng; 'and at this hour! Why, she was quite ill when I left. Did she say where she was going?'

'No, ma'am; but she has left this note for you,' said Briggs, handing her a small missive.

Mrs. Byng opened it, and glanced over the contents. Then she pursued her way to her boudoir, and ordered some tea. Then, taking her seat by the fire, she read the note again. It was as follows:

My dearest Laura,

'I have been alone all day, and have been feeling dreadfully ill and depressed.

Your return seems so uncertain, that I have decided to go and see Kate Beverley. Do not worry about me. I may stay some time, but I will get Mr. Beverley to see me home.

'Ever yours affectionately,

'SIB.'

A pang of reproach shot through the widow's heart.

'Poor child!' she said. 'It is hard to make her suffer as well; but I must go through with it now I have gone so far.'

Her first impulse was to follow Sib, and bring her back herself; but then she reflected that, if Glyn brought her back, she would have him, probably, for the rest of the evening; so she thought she would let matters take their course. She therefore settled herself by the fire, and fell to musing

The hours passed. Dinner was announced, but Sib had not returned. Mrs. Byng did not consider there was any cause for anxiety. In fact, the thought never crossed her mind. She ate her dinner in solitude, her appetite

sharpened by the sea-air and the thought of her successful move. After dinner she went to the drawing-room, and, throwing herself on a couch, dropped off into a sound sleep.

When she awoke, the fire was burning low. She generally rang for tea, so the servant had not disturbed her. She glanced at the clock: to her great surprise, the hand pointed to ten.

She rang the bell, and Briggs appeared.

'Has Miss Maitland returned?' she asked.

'No, ma'am.'

'What can be keeping her so late, I wonder?' said the widow.

She told Briggs to bring some tea. Having taken a cup, she sat on by the fire, feeling somewhat anxious. Half an hour passed; her anxiety increased, still there was no Sib. When eleven o'clock struck, she could bear it no longer. She rang again, and told Briggs to summon a four-wheeled cab. Then she sent Annette for a cloak and shawl, and, wrapping herself well up, started on her way to Mrs. Beverley's lodgings.

It was half-past eight when Glyn reached Charing Cross. He hurried out of the station, as he was anxious to reach home and see how his mother was getting on.

He was just passing the gates of the station yard when the slight form of a woman hurried past him, wrapped in a close-fitting ulster. Something in the figure, and in the glimpse of the profile which he caught, attracted his attention.

'It is awfully like her,' he said, 'and yet it cannot be at this hour.'

The woman turned down Villiers Street at a quick pace. Glyn was determined to satisfy himself. He ran quickly through the station and down the steps leading to the Metropolitan Railway.

As he neared the bottom of the flight, the woman who had excited his curiosity approached. He drew back a little, but he saw her plainly, for the moonlight was bright upon her face.

His suspicions were confirmed; it was Sib Maitland.

She did not see him, for she was looking

straight before her. In the utmost wonder he followed her.

She turned a little to the left to avoid the Metropolitan station, and then went straight through the archway on to the Embankment.

It was comparatively deserted at this hour. She advanced to the parapet and stood gazing on to the river. Glyn kept in the shadow of the station, and watched her closely, with a vague sensation of distrust. She stood gazing a long time. The moon was shimmering on the dark water, which was rushing downward with a strong tide. The rapid eddies were traced in silver lines of moonlight, and the waters faded into a thin white mist which almost hid the opposite shore, with its tall shot-tower and lines of wharves. The railway-bridge rose up dark and ominous to the right, with deep, mysterious shadows between its piles, and the sound of rushing water where the huge pillars intercepted the strong tide.

Suddenly Sib turned away from the water, and started off at a quick pace across the

road. Then she pursued her way eastward.

'What on earth does it mean?' thought Glyn, as he followed at a safe distance. He did not like to obtrude himself upon her, under the circumstances; at the same time he felt that he ought not to leave her alone at such an hour. Suddenly she crossed the road again towards the river, and once more stood gazing into the dark rushing waters. She seemed quite unconscious of Glyn's presence. She never once looked round, though there was little more than the width of the road between them.

After a brief interval she turned westward again, walking rapidly towards the railway-bridge.

Glyn crossed, and followed on the other side, proceeding almost abreast of her. One or two vehicles passed along the road, and a few foot-passengers, so that the sound of his steps was lost. When she arrived at the wooden way which leads down to the steamboats, just opposite the Metropolitan station, she stopped again. Glyn slipped

into the shadow of the archway, still unobserved.

'How long is this to go on?' he thought. 'Poor little soul! She is restless and unhappy like myself, but I must speak to her if she stays much longer. I don't like the look of things.'

Suddenly there was another movement. Sib Maitland made a step or two forward, and disappeared into the narrow footway leading to the river. Seriously alarmed, Glyn sprang forward and followed her.

As he reached the footway, he saw Sib speeding rapidly down it, near the bottom. To his surprise, he found that the iron gates at the top were shut. She must have passed these in some way. At a second glance he saw how. There was a narrow space between the supports of the gate and the masonry at the sides, which could be passed through by stepping up on to the ironwork. She must have gone that way. In an instant Glyn had passed the barrier, and was speeding down after her.

He was too late. As he turned the corner

at the bottom on to the landing-stage, he saw the flutter of a dress on the further side, and the next moment he heard a splash.

Sib Maitland was battling with the dark water, whose cruel eddies closed over her and dragged her down.

Glyn was a strong swimmer, but he had never before been confronted with such an emergency as this. Instinctively, he threw off his coat and shoes, and the next instant he was in the water, striking out bravely towards the scrap of still floating drapery, which lay white in the moonlight.

Before he could reach it it had disappeared.

He looked eagerly about him. He felt almost supernaturally calm, as all really brave natures do in emergencies. He knew the girl's life depended on the keenest observation and instant action. He felt, moreover, that she would come to the surface again. The eddies would raise her sooner or later.

Meanwhile, he was drifting rapidly downwards with the tide.

He did not utter a cry. He took in the

whole situation at a glance. There was no possible help for her except from him. She would be drowned before anyone else could come to her aid. It was useless, therefore, to expend his breath in cries. He knew, if the worst came to the worst, that he could save himself by swimming to the Adelphi steps.

Something struck lightly against his legs. He made a sudden dive, and clutched a piece of drapery. It was the neckerchief round Sib's throat, which was luckily tied securely in a bow in front. In another moment he had her head above water.

But how was he to keep it there, and still steer for the steps? She was already unconscious, but Glyn knew this was the best thing that could have happened, as she would not struggle. He remembered reading in the instructions for saving people from drowning that the best plan is to get your hand under the arm-pit. Glyn did so, but still it was hard work bearing her up and swimming with one hand. His heart almost failed him.

Suddenly a strong eddy swept him in towards the wall. Oh, if there were but a chain, or a projection even! But there was nothing. Nothing but the slimy green stones, that were less to be depended on than the water. He struck out again, almost going under with his burden more than once, as the strong current swept them onward. They were out in the stream again, rapidly nearing the projection of the steps. Good God! would he miss them, after all?

Now was the time for help. He raised one loud, shrill cry. The next moment he was conscious of a shout in response, and saw a figure running down the steps.

The outermost angle of the masonry was within a yard or two, but the strong tide was hurrying him past. He gave one or two frantic strokes; he stretched out his hand. His fingers reached to within six inches of the stonework; still he was hurrying past. The lifting of his hand sent him under. He felt that the struggle was useless—a deadly despair seized him. He must relinquish his burden or drown.

At that instant a hand clutched his own, and he was drawn rapidly backwards. The sudden change almost made him lose his hold of the girl, but he gripped her arm firmly. In another moment both were dragged on to the steps, with two policemen bending over them.

'That's a narrow shave, mister! What does all this mean?' said one, as he dragged Glyn high and dry, while his comrade handled Sibyl.

But Glyn was too exhausted to answer. He lay on the steps breathing heavily.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SIB ASKS A QUESTION.

'How did it happen, Glyn?' said Kate Beverley, as the brother and sister sat by a good fire an hour or two later. 'It must have been a terribly narrow escape.'

'An awfully near shave, I assure you. Those instructions to swimmers are all very well in theory, but when you have to put them into practice, especially in a strong tideway, it is quite another matter. I thought it was all up with both of us once or twice.'

'And you say it was through some disappointment?'

'Yes. It's useless concealing facts, and I know you will not betray her secret. The

fact is, there's some horrid news come—horrid for both of us. Blanche is going to marry that fellow D'Eyncourt. Sib Maitland was in love with him.'

'Going to marry him? Oh, Glyn, this cannot be true!'

It was for her brother that her cry went out, for she knew what a death-blow this was to his hopes.

'I wish to Heaven I could think so. Mrs. Byng told me so herself, and, besides, that poor girl would never have committed such a rash act if she had not been sure of it. It is horrible. Every hope in life is gone.'

He threw his head back with a look of dull despair. His sister knew that words of consolation at such a time would be vain. She softly took his hand without speaking.

'Ah!' exclaimed Glyn, with a long-drawn sigh, 'it is useless giving way. I have enough on my hands without this, God knows! I suppose others have had to endure the same thing; but there does appear to be a fearful combination of bad luck against me at present. How is the mother now?'

'She was calmer when I left her just now. I can relieve your mind about her. Mrs. Byng has been so kind. She has been to Brighton and arranged all about lodgings, and says it will cost us very little indeed, as it is an old servant of hers who has the rooms to let.'

'That is awfully good of her. I must go to her at once, late as it is. She will be in a great state of mind about Miss Maitland. Just step up and see how she is now. I should like to be able to take a good report of her.'

Kate left the room, and Glyn sat down again before the fire. Strong as he was, the physical exhaustion he had undergone had weakened him considerably, and in spite of dry clothing and stimulants he was feeling the effects. He had judged it better to take Sib to his own place. The landlady was a kind, motherly woman, and his sister was also there to help and advise. Besides, he hoped a scandal would be avoided. Nothing need be said about Sib Maitland's affairs in his own rooms; but if he had taken her to

Bruton Street the servants would have gossiped for a month.

As to the young lady who had caused all this commotion, she was snug in bed in a deep sleep. The guardians of the peace who had dragged Glyn and his burthen from the water had wrapped them both in their own overcoats, and, at Glyn's entreaty, had driven direct to Gower Street. So that, with the exception of a short-lived wonderment among the small crowd which even at that hour had of course collected, the affair, tragical as it might have been, terminated quietly. Glyn, indeed, had managed to make the policemen believe that the whole affair was an accident—that the young lady had overbalanced herself, and had fallen into the water; and of course he and Sib were put down as a pair of lovers taking a moonlight stroll.

On their arrival in Gower Street the doctor had been hastily summoned, and had adopted certain remedies which proved efficacious. He did not apprehend any very serious results. Warmth and rest were the

chief things at present. The sleep into which Sib had fallen was the very best thing for her.

At first Glyn had intended not to say a word about the night's adventures even to Mrs. Byng; but as Sib would have to return there, he thought it best to tell her all that had occurred in strict confidence. He must, moreover, caution the widow about leaving her alone in her present state of mind. The affair had done Glyn good. He laid the lesson to heart. He, at least, had not reached such a depth of despair as this poor girl had. There must be something more in her connection with D'Eyncourt than he had before surmised, to have driven her to such an extremity.

In the midst of his musings he was startled by a double-knock at the door. The next moment he heard Mrs. Byng's voice in the hall. He rose to meet her as she entered the room.

'Oh, Mr. Beverley, I am sure something has happened! What on earth is keeping Sib here at this hour? How pale you look!

What does it all mean? She left a note to say you would bring her home.'

Glyn gave her a chair, and then told her as briefly as possible what had taken place. The widow turned deadly pale, and, to Glyn's surprise, remained speechless.

'Are you not dreadfully shocked?' he asked. 'I suppose it was the news of this morning which caused it. She must indeed have been fond of him to be driven to such an act.'

'It is very, very dreadful,' the widow answered. She kept her eyes fixed on the fire with a strangely troubled look in her face, such as Glyn had never seen there before. It was almost the look of a criminal. She went on hastily: 'But, then, Sib is always impulsive. These usually quiet creatures do the strangest things under the influence of excitement. What a merciful thing it was that you were there!'

The widow shuddered, as if struck with a sudden chill. Then she drew closer to the fire.

'You, too. It was a narrow escape for

both. You are not feeling any ill effects, I hope,' she added, looking up suddenly.

'No, nothing particular,' Glyn said. He had made light of the struggle he had gone through in saving Sib. He had led the widow to suppose it was merely a plunge in and out again. It was Sib's act which upset her so much.

'Do you know,' she went on, 'I think it will be much better for me not to know anything about this affair. I am sure she would not wish me to know it. It would be much less awkward. Might it not be supposed she was taken ill while paying you a visit?'

'I dare say it might. I will speak to Kate about it.'

'It is so sad, too, just now, when you have so much trouble on your hands. I can relieve your mind on one subject, however. I have found a place for your mother to go where she will be well looked after, and at a very slight cost.'

'So Kate tells me. It is really very kind of you to take so much trouble. I don't know how to thank you sufficiently.'

'It is a great pleasure to me to help you. You know I would do very much more for you than that.'

The widow's voice was a little tremulous as she said these words; but Glyn had gone off into a reverie again, and their significance was lost on him.

'Now, I am going to make a request,' said the widow. 'I am sure you and your sister have both had worry and bother enough for to-night. You must let me sit up with your mother. I can send back the cab to tell them not to expect me home.'

'Someone must remain with Miss Maitland, I fancy,' Glyn answered. 'I thought of sitting up with my mother, and Kate can remain with her.'

'Indeed, you will do nothing of the kind. You must really let me stay.'

Kate entered the room at this moment. The widow repeated her offer.

'It is very kind of you, but there is no necessity,' Kate said. 'I must sit up, for I promised Miss Maitland I would not leave her. Poor little soul! she is sorely dis-

tressed. I can go in to my mother occasionally, and get her all that is necessary. Besides, they are both sleeping soundly now. Our landlady has also offered to help, if necessary. Everyone is so very kind.'

It was clearly useless for the widow to stay, and she saw it. She left somewhat reluctantly, promising to come early in the morning.

'You need say nothing to Sib of my having been here to-night. Her illness may be supposed to be quite accidental. I cannot tell you how thankful I am that you happened to see her, Mr. Beverley. I shall be eternally grateful!'

In the middle of the night Sib Maitland woke up suddenly, and fixed her eyes on Kate, who was sitting in deep thought by her bedside. Kate did not perceive that she was awake until she spoke. Her voice came very faintly to her ear.

'Miss Beverley.'

'Yes, dear,' answered Kate, bending over her.

'Do you know why I did that dreadful thing last night?'

'I think I do, dear.'

Sib looked at her with eyes of wonder.

'Why, who could have told you?' she asked.

'My brother suspected it long ago, and he connected it with the letter which came yesterday.'

'Did he, really? How strange that he should have noticed it! I thought no one in the world suspected.'

There was a pause of some minutes. Kate thought she was dropping off to sleep again, for her eyes were closed. The loud rattle of a cab sounded in the street below; before its echoes had died away, Sib spoke again.

'Will you take my hand? I like to feel that you are near me, and—may I call you Kate?'

'Certainly, dear, if you like.'

'Listen, Kate. Bend down your ear. It was very good and brave of your brother to save me, but I wish he had not done so. I

cannot live without *him!* Oh, I cannot, I cannot!'

She broke into a low wail. Kate knelt by the bedside, and put her arms about the frail form, and strove to whisper words of comfort.

'You do not know how I loved him,' Sib went on. 'I never had a thought for anyone else. I always told him I should die if he were false to me, and I have suffered so cruelly in these last two years. Oh, how terrible it is for a man to say that he loves you unless he is quite sure of his own heart!'

'But you will get over this, now that you know the truth,' said Kate. 'It is most unlikely that you should continue to waste your heart on one who treated you so badly. He is not worthy of you!'

'I don't like to hear him spoken against, even now. Perhaps you do not know what it is to love as I have loved. Do you?' she added, looking up suddenly.

Kate bent down her head to hide the pang which shot through her heart and brought a sudden crimson flush to her cheek.

'Do you know what it is,' Sib went on,

'to have no thought apart from the one you love? For it to be the first thought that strikes you when you open your eyes in the morning, and the last to mingle with your prayers at night? Never to have the least sense of happiness apart from him? Always to think of him when you look at a beautiful cloud, or a flower, or at the wide blue sea? To go about with a dull sense of pain ever at the heart when he is absent, and even when he is present; to feel for him a love so intense that it becomes almost pain? Oh, why are we created with feelings so acute that it seems impossible to be ever really happy, except in some very, very brief moments?'

'Hush, hush, dear!' Kate answered. 'Your love has not been a happy one, perhaps, at any time. If you had perfect confidence in the man you loved, you would not have felt this pain. It would have been a heaven of happiness to you. You have mistrusted him, unknown to yourself.'

'Perhaps I did—perhaps I did! I see it all now. If God would only deliver me from

this endless pain, how thankful I should be! I am so very, very weary of life!'

'You are weak and ill now. When you are better, you will see things differently. You will grow more hopeful. At your age hope must come, and happiness by-and-by.'

'I do not think so; but how tired you must be! How good you are to me! Will you come and lie down beside me? Perhaps I should go to sleep again. It is the only respite from pain now.'

'I will come almost immediately,' Kate answered, as she rose from the bedside. She hurried to her mother's room. To her great relief, the old lady slept soundly. Then she returned to Sib, and was glad to lie down and put her arms around her.

So, as the early morning light came stealing into the room, the two lay side by side, wrapped in that oblivion which is God's blessed antidote for all earthly pain.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FATAL STEP.

ANOTHER week had passed. Glyn's labours at the widow's were coming to a close, but no improvement had taken place in his mental condition. Indeed, his anxieties had reached such a pitch that it was not to be expected. He had got his mother and sister away to the lodgings at Brighton which Mrs. Byng had secured for them, but the expenses of the move had reduced his small stock of money to the lowest possible ebb. In fact, he had scarcely enough left to pay his daily expenses for more than a week or two.

It is true there was the money to come for Mrs. Byng's portrait; but he could not expect that until the picture was finished,

and that could not be done in a hurry, for the simple reason that the widow threw every possible obstacle in the way of its accomplishment. He had already been double the time over it that he would have been under ordinary circumstances. One morning it was a headache which prevented the widow from sitting, and Glyn must amuse her while she reclined on her favourite couch, deluging herself with eau de Cologne. Another morning a walk in the Park was a necessity. It was so nice in the morning, when there were not many people about, and they could sit under the trees and talk uninterruptedly. Picture-galleries, too, which in these days spring up wherever there is a chance of catching stray shillings, claimed a considerable amount of time, and as it was, of course, a good thing for Glyn to see what other artists were about, he was always the escort on these occasions.

All this would have been very pleasant if Glyn had not been so oppressed with anxieties, monetary and otherwise. As it was, his only desire was to get on with his

work, and he naturally chafed under these perpetual delays. His nature revolted from the thought of letting the widow know to what an extremely low ebb his finances had dropped; and, besides, there really were many occasions when he felt so depressed that he could not have done justice to his work. To insure success an artist, more than any one, requires a clear mind and a steady hand. Even with these, success is difficult of attainment; without them, it is next to impossible. To endeavour to reproduce all the subtle delicacies of tone, all the exquisite varieties of form, all the magical effects of light and shade, which inexhaustible Nature is constantly presenting to our view, while the heart is bowed down with care, is to court certain failure. 'Painting,' as Sir Joshua remarks, 'is a jealous mistress,' and requires absolute devotion from her followers.

So Glyn struggled on as best he could until he was brought face to face with the thought that his finances were coming absolutely to an end. Money must be supplied to keep his people going at

Brighton; money he must have to keep himself going, though, indeed, he had reduced his own expenses to the lowest possible sum consistent with the respectable appearance his position and pursuits demanded. Moreover, these excursions with the widow cost something, although she was as scrupulously careful to pay her way as she could be under the circumstances. Still, it was impossible to let her pay for every shilling cab or sixpenny catalogue, and even these run into money in the course of time.

Sib had gone to Brighton with Kate and her mother. The widow had arranged this. A change was necessary for the girl. She had struck up a great friendship with Kate. They would be helpful to each other. The thought of returning home after what had occurred was utterly distasteful to her; and the sufferings of that last day in Bruton Street had been so dreadful that the idea of returning there had not even been suggested. So she asked and obtained permission to go with Kate, to whom she clung with an eagerness not to be resisted.

'Might I speak to you for a moment, sir?' asked Glyn's landlady, about a week after his mother's departure, and just as he was about to leave for his morning walk to the widow's.

Glyn had an intuitive perception of what was coming, and his heart sank.

'Certainly, Mrs. Watson; but I am rather in a hurry. What is it?'

'Well, sir, I hope you'll excuse me, but you see, sir, the young lady being here and all has put me about a goodish bit. If it would be convenient to let me have a little money on account of the fortnight's bill, I should be greatly obliged.'

Glyn turned away to take up his hat, and to hide the consternation with which he heard this premature demand. There was nothing unreasonable in it, of course. Mrs. Watson had been put to many little expenses on account of the sudden accession to the number of her lodgers under such peculiar circumstances, and she was not overburthened with spare cash. The demand, however, fell upon Glyn like a thunderbolt.

'If you will leave the account, I will see

about it by-and-by, Mrs. Watson,' he said, with as much calmness as he could command.

'Thank you, sir; and if you could make it convenient before seven this evening, it would be a great help to me, sir.'

'I'll see what I can do,' said Glyn, taking the bill.

Mrs. Watson left the room. Glyn opened the paper which she had left in his hand. Considering the condition of his purse, the amount was sufficiently staggering. He sat contemplating the total for a considerable time.

'How on earth is it to be managed!' he at length exclaimed.

Of course, the most sensible thing would have been to have told his landlady that it was not convenient for a day or two; but sensitive people are not, as a rule, sensible, and Glyn worked himself into a fever over the thought of how he was to meet his landlady that evening without the money. Possibly, if he had not been weighted with other cares, he might have thrown this off; but the succession of disappointments and

anxieties which he had undergone had shaken his system, and caused him to take an exaggerated view of everything.

He set out on his way to Bruton Street, feeling unusually oppressed and unfit for work. He strove hard to battle with the feeling. He knew that the fact of finishing the widow's picture successfully would bring him pecuniary relief, and possibly lead to more work. It was useless reasoning. Reasoning cannot dispel the effects of a severe mental shock. Some stronger remedies are required.

In crossing Bond Street, he came suddenly upon Forbes, who was as stout as ever, and appeared to be taking life with his usual serenity.

'Beverley, by Jove! Awfully glad to see you! I was coming to look you up. But, I say, you're looking seedy, don't you know! You want another cruise in the *Mayfly*.'

'I've been rather hard at work,' answered Glyn evasively. 'I shouldn't at all mind another trip——'

He stopped abruptly, for the thought of

his present state of gloom, contrasted with the hopefulness of heart which had been his in the trip to the Land's End, almost choked him.

'I suppose you've heard the news,' Forbes went on. 'Deuced odd thing she should have taken to D'Eyncourt after all! Thought she had pitched him over for good. I hear they are to be married next month.'

Every word of this was a dagger to Glyn.

'He has heard it too,' he thought. 'All the world seems to know it.' He hastened to get away. 'I know you'll forgive me, but I am late for my appointment. I shall be so glad if you can look me up at my studio.'

'All right, don't let me keep you. It must be awfully queer to be in a hurry—never was in a hurry in my life! Look here, old man, come and dine with me at the club to-night. I want to have a chat with you about this affair, don't you know.'

'I'm afraid I can't to-night,' stammered Glyn. 'Come and see me first. I'm very busy at present.'

'That's all right,' said unsuspicious Forbes.

'R.A. one of these days, I expect. By the way, I don't see Blanche's picture in the Exhibition.'

'No; they didn't hang it,' said Glyn, with another knife in his heart.

'Not hang it, by Jove! Nothing prettier there—that's my notion. Well, it don't much matter if you're busy, does it? Money tumbling in in cartloads, I expect.'

'Well, not exactly,' said Glyn, with a vivid consciousness of the scantiness of his purse. 'We don't make fortunes in a week, you know.'

The conversation was becoming intolerable to him. Blunt, good-natured Forbes had stumbled upon every topic which was calculated to increase the mental torture he was undergoing. Glyn bade him a hasty adieu, and hurried on with a sensation of reckless despair.

Yet, if he had taken the trouble to inquire, he would have found that Forbes had gathered his information about Blanche from the same source as himself—namely, Mrs. Byng. For some reason, best known to

herself, that far-seeing little widow had not mentioned to Forbes that she was sitting to Glyn for her portrait, consequently her name did not crop up. Glyn naturally concluded that the engagement was the talk of the town.

He hastened on his way. Through all this trying time he had never felt so dispirited, so utterly cast down, as he did this morning. That request of his landlady, trifling as it was, was the last straw. The widow, for a wonder, did not notice his depression. She was unusually talkative, but this only tended to increase Glyn's gloom. He really felt seriously ill. His hand shook, the colours seemed to blend confusedly. He had no correct appreciation of what he was doing. His whole system was unstrung.

He struggled on for half an hour with a pain at his heart, and an absolute oppression of brain, such as he had never felt before. The widow's incessant rattle of words almost maddened him. At last he could bear it no longer. He put down his palette.

'Mrs. Byng, I really feel awfully ill. I am afraid I must give it up.'

He sank into a chair, and clasped his hand tightly over his face, as if to shut out his trouble.

One deep, heart-wrung groan broke from him. Then he was quite still. He was conscious of a hand stealing round his neck, and then into his own.

'I cannot tell you how I long to comfort you, Glyn,' the widow said. 'Oh, if I only had the right!'

No man could resist sympathy at such a time. Glyn pressed the hand that lay in his with a feeling of gratitude, but he did not look up.

'You know how I betrayed my weakness when we were on the Cornish coast,' the widow went on. 'You have never once made me feel how weak I was. It was very noble and generous of you, but it only makes me fonder of you than ever—weaker than ever! I cannot help telling you when I see you broken down like this. If you would only let me save you from all this worry that

I know is wearing you out, what a happiness it would be to me!'

A mad impulse rushed through Glyn's brain. The acts that influence a life are often the birth of a moment. He looked up suddenly, and rose from his chair.

'My secret cannot be hidden from you,' he said. 'Do you mean to tell me you would marry me, knowing what is in my heart—knowing my love for another woman?'

'Who does not love *you!* Remember that. You could not continue to love her when you know she has forsaken you for another.'

'Do not trifle with me, Mrs. Byng. I am in a desperate mood. If you mean to say you will take me, with all my cares and poverty—with a ruined heart—I am yours; and, so help me, Heaven, I will strive to make you a good husband!'

A delicious sensation of triumph stole into the widow's heart. Her aim was accomplished. She had gained the end for which she had schemed and plotted through so many months. She put her hands on

Glyn's shoulders, and laid her cheek on his breast.

'Oh, Glyn, this is too much happiness!' she said. 'I have no fear but that you will grow to love me, for I love you so dearly. It is dreadful for me to confess it again, but I cannot help it.'

Glyn put his arms round her in response to her loving words, and then her eyes looked up to his with a devotion he could not mistake. He stooped and pressed a kiss upon her pretty lips

And thus, in five minutes, was wrought the one fatal error of his life.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NEMESIS.

'And now, Glyn, you must let me claim the privilege of helping you. I know you are bothered about money matters. It is useless your trying to conceal the fact. I have seen it for a long time.'

'I cannot borrow from you even now, Laura, I'm afraid.'

The utterance of the Christian name was an effort to him. In some way it jarred upon him. Of course, under the circumstances, anything else would have been absurd. Mrs. Byng had no such hesitation, however.

'Why, Glyn dear, you are as proud as Lucifer! I don't want you to borrow. You have only to take what you have earned.'

'But I have not yet earned it.'

'Yes, you have. All artists get half-payment in advance. You are too proud to ask for it, but you know it is your due. Indeed, you would have earned the whole if I had not asked you to take me to so many places. I was so fond of having you with me, Glyn.'

'You are a dear little woman, and have been awfully good to me,' said Glyn, kissing her again.

In truth, he could not help liking her very much. Not with the feeling that he should have entertained towards his future wife, but he trusted that would come. Her house had always been open to him; he had always been received with the brightest smiles; she had striven to help him in every way. How could he help liking her? Moreover, it was evident that she loved him very dearly, and this is always flattering to a man's vanity. He cannot but feel a warm regard for a woman who places him before all the rest of the world in her affections, even if his own are set upon another object.

So Glyn walked home to his landlady that morning with a fifty-pound note in his pocket, which he tried hard to feel was his in virtue of his having earned it.

It is astonishing what a lightness of heart a man feels, even in the midst of acute mental trials, when he is suddenly relieved from the additional worry and irritation of pecuniary difficulties. My good lords and ladies and millionaires, you have your trials, no doubt, like all the rest of Eve's children. You see your children torn from your side by the ruthless hand of Death. You mourn a deeply-loved parent, or husband, or wife. You find your best motives misconstrued; you strive to benefit your fellow-creatures, and you are accused of sordid ends. You are a mark for the shafts of calumny, anger, and scorn; you suffer all the ills which divine Will Shakespeare sums up in such pregnant words in that immortal soliloquy of Hamlet's, but you have not the additional grievance which the poor man has of not knowing where to get your dinner, or how to pay your next quarter's rent. It is not the

man who fumes at the injustice of mankind, or the hard strokes of fate from the midst of luxurious couches, who is the hero. It is he who struggles for his daily pittance in the midst of mental tortures which bring the sleepless pillow and the worn and jaded brow.

It was an immense relief to Glyn, no doubt, this sudden turn of fortune. He not only gave his landlady something on account, but paid her up to the end of the fortnight. He sat down and wrote a long letter to his sister, telling her all that had occurred, and sending her a five-pound note for any little extras they might require. He was not at all sure how Kate would receive the news. He feared it would be a shock to her; but the thing was done, and could not now be undone. He argued that he had been driven to this course by the faithlessness of Blanche —who, be it remembered, had never promised to be faithful—and by the hard blows of fortune; and, indeed, the most carping critic, on reviewing all the circumstances of the case, must have found some excuse for him.

He did not, however, give himself much time to reflect. He had promised to take the widow out that afternoon, and she looked so bright and rosy when she met him at the door attired for the walk, that Glyn must have been a cynic indeed not to feel a little proud of her. As for the widow, she was in such exuberant spirits that Glyn could not help feeling a little reflected happiness in the thought of the happiness he had conferred. They walked and they shopped, and she bought all sorts of pretty things for her future lord—studs and sleeve-links, and the like—at prices which startled Glyn, who had been brought up with the strictest notions of economy. He began to think the widow's resources were practically unlimited, though, to do him justice, he had never taken the trouble to ascertain what she was worth.

Then they went back to Bruton Street, and Forbes came to dinner, and was told all about it, and opened his eyes wider than they had opened for a very considerable period. And who should drop in in the evening but Reginald Barker—a very rare visitor in

Bruton Street except on state occasions. He, too, soon divined how the land lay, and looked rather grave. Perhaps he thought that a gay young widow, fond of dress and life and society, was not exactly the wife to help a young painter up the ladder of fame. Barker was too much of a man of the world, however, to trouble himself about other people's follies, and the cloud soon passed. They had music and chat and coffee, and there was much laughter, and many sparkling things dropped from Barker's lips, at which Forbes sat and roared. So the excitement was kept up until a late hour, and when Glyn said good-night some half-hour or so after the others, the widow was so pretty and loving, and looked so happy, that he fancied himself half in love with her in return, and so pursued his way to his lodgings with a lighter heart than he had known for many a day.

But Nemesis was to follow. A man cannot propose to a pretty widow, receive the congratulations of her friends, have presents showered upon him, and (after dining on everything of the best) spend the evening in

pleasant converse, without undergoing a certain amount of excitement, even if he have a heavy grief weighing on his heart. The excitement keeps him going until the end of the day, even through the last cigar which he smokes before seeking his pillow.

It is in the dead of night that the reaction comes. We go to sleep thinking that our grief is well-nigh at an end. We slumber heavily—say, for three hours. Suddenly, and for no apparent reason, we are wide awake, gazing into the black void of the darkened room. There is an agonized rush of thought—the excitement is gone—and the truth lies before us bare and cold, stripped of all disguises, wringing our hearts with intolerable anguish.

So it was with Glyn. He slept heavily for some hours. He dreamed, as he often did, of Lupton and those exquisite days of the last summer. This time, too, his dream assumed a phase more than ordinarily delicious. He was with Blanche, wandering away into the summer woods. An infinite field of pure, bright, spotless blue lay far

above; a shimmer of silver sunlight was on the leafage around; a fragrance of moss and fern and flowers stole up and touched the inner senses with an exquisite joy. There was no barrier between himself and the girl he loved. The unfettered immunity of dreams had dispelled all conventionalities. For them was love alone, and the joyous Nature around. She was close by his side, her sweet eyes gazing up into his, the flush of perfect joy on her cheek, the smile of perfect love on her lips. He drew her towards him, a delirious joy thrilled him, his lips approached hers, but ere they came in contact the very intensity of his joy broke the spell, and he awoke.

'What a delicious dream!' he exclaimed.

The spell was on him still, so intense, so vivid, had been his dream.

Suddenly came the rush of thought. She was in Italy—engaged to D'Eyncourt!

It cut his heart literally like a knife. Another moment, and then came the thought of what he himself had done. Plighted himself to a woman he did not love—whom he

could never love as a husband should love a wife. His dream had driven this truth irresistibly into his burning brain, and his deed rose before him in all its bare hideousness. Was he mad when he did this thing? False to Blanche? false to himself? false to honour, manliness, and self-respect? The truth so gripped his heart that the agony was more than he could endure. He half rose in his bed, pressing his hands tightly on his beating temples, vainly striving to soothe the turmoil of his brain.

'My God!' he cried, 'is it come to this?'

He rose and paced the room. He deluged his head with cold water. All in vain. Thought crowded on thought, agony on agony. What if Blanche were false to him? Was this any reason why, in a moment of mad impulse and spite, he should give himself to another woman? A woman who had no thought in common with him, a woman bent on all things he despised. To have been true to the memory of Blanche, even through years of sufferings, would have brought more permanent peace than the love

of any other woman in the world. But now, how had he sold himself! For what a future had he sacrificed his self-respect! Well might he exclaim, with Claude Melnotte, 'Give me back my poverty and my honour!'

But it might yet be undone. It was not yet too late. He would go to the widow in the morning, point out to her the deep wrong he had done her, show her the impossibility of permanent happiness under such circumstances. On reflection, she must see the thing in the same light as he did. She would not be unreasonable. She would set him free. Blanche should know that, however cruelly she had behaved, he had at least been true to her. Yes, this is what he would do the first thing in the morning.

With another rush came the thought of Forbes and Barker, of the widow's presents, of the fifty pounds, of all the little woman's goodness and happiness. What right had he selfishly to blight her hopes? to hold her up to the ridicule of her friends? No right. He had been a mad, blind fool; but he was pledged in honour to fulfil his engagement.

He could not blink this fact. She knew he loved another woman, but she had taken him with all her heart. There was but one course open to him—to marry her.

'Then let it be speedily,' he cried, with a sigh which seemed to rend his heart. 'Let the climax come as quickly as possible, then I shall know the worst, and things may grow better. Better! Is there a better for me? It seems to me that my whole future will be a purposeless hell!'

He tossed about restlessly for another hour. Then came the morning light, and he grew calmer. Who does not know the soothing effect of the morning light after a night of sleeplessness and grief?

'Yes; I will ask her to marry me at once,' he said. 'It can be in some quiet country church, without any fuss or ceremony. Then we will go abroad, away from all thoughts and associations with the past—away from all thoughts of *her*. Then perhaps I may at last learn to forget. Pray Heaven I may! Pray Heaven I may!'

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT ZERMATT.

ZERMATT! What marvellous recollections are awakened by the very name! What visions of snow-clad peaks, mighty glaciers, foaming torrents, and shadowy pines! Monte Rosa, the Breithorn, the Matterhorn, the Weisshorn, the Stockhorn, stand around you in a majesty of silence more eloquent than words, linked in a mystic circle with bands of ice. If at intervals they speak, it is in the rush and roar of an avalanche, or the crack of a mighty glacier. Gazing from the Görnergrat, five thousand feet above the village, miles and miles of ice-fields lie below, at such a dizzy depth that a stone thrown from where you stand vanishes in mid-air before it is half-way

down. Here for a mile or two the ice-plain lies with its mantle of snow as smooth and soft as the breast of a swan. There it is cracked and rent and riven into a million fantastic shapes. Pinnacles, spires, and bastions are heaped in inextricable confusion. Huge crevasses yawn between. Ice-caverns, blue as heaven, lie hidden in the depths, and over all the sunshine gleams and glints as from ten thousand diamond facets, turning it all to a realm of unimaginable delight.

On the western side of this glorious valley Glyn had set up his easel, far up on the slopes leading to the Hornli. He had been married a month. After a hurried visit to his mother, who was thriving wonderfully in the pure sea-air, he and his wife had come abroad, and had been moving from place to place until they reached Zermatt, whose wonders so impressed Glyn that he resolved to recommence work without delay.

It was the best thing he could do. In spite of change of scene and relief from pressing needs, he went about with a dull weight at his heart, which was almost worse

than active grief, for it never left him night or day. He strove hard to hide it from his wife, to whom he was all kindness, and in this he happily succeeded. Laura's nature was one that never indulged in strong emotions; she liked to glide through life easily. As she did not go into heroics herself, she did not much care for them in other people. She had secured the husband of her choice. He was very attentive and kind, and seemed to her fairly happy. It was not therefore necessary for her to ask whether he was getting over his former hopeless attachment. Indeed, there were many circumstances connected with the case which rendered it anything but an agreeable topic to Mrs. Glyn Beverley. So, in this month of her second honeymoon, she let it drop out of her mind altogether.

'Do you care about my going with you to-day, Glyn?' she asked, as her husband was putting his traps together at the Monte Rosa.

'Why, dear?'

'Because, love, those nice people from

Kensington are going up to the Riffel, and have asked us to go with them. I said I was sure you would not go, as you were so bent on your sketch.'

'And that means that you promised you would,' said Glyn, laughing. 'Of course you can do as you like. I dare say it is dull for you, sitting reading all day while I am sketching.'

To do Laura justice, she had stuck to her work manfully for the first few days, taking books and her work with her, and keeping pretty closely to Glyn's side while he worked. But this could not last, and Glyn, who read her nature thoroughly, knew it. She had no real appreciation of art, nor interest in watching the progress of a picture. She liked what was pretty, but the lengthened process of producing the pretty object was tedious to her.

So Laura, mounted on a pony, set off with her new friends to climb the steep ascent to the Riffel, and enjoy a nice dinner at the hotel, so pleasantly perched on the shoulder of the mountain some three thousand feet

above Zermatt; while her husband, shouldering his haversack, set out alone to mount the slopes of the Hornli.

His easel and heavier traps were left at a châlet in the high pastures that overlook the magnificent ice-fall of the Görner Glacier, so that, being light-weighted, he trudged briskly onward.

Was it to be wondered at that he drew a long sigh of relief when he was fairly away from the village, and had crossed the swift stream which comes downward in such mad haste from the Z'Mutt Glacier? He had hardly been alone since his marriage; and, when there is a constant pain at the heart, companionship of the light-hearted becomes at times intolerable. To get away into the vast solitudes of Nature is at such times a relief unspeakable.

He sat down on a slope of rich flowing grass twinkling in the intense sunshine, and alive with butterflies, which rival the flowers themselves in these wondrous Swiss valleys. Far down to the right the stream rushed and foamed over a chaos of huge boulders, which

strove in vain to block its passage through the narrow gorge.

Beyond the gorge lay slope upon slope of rich pastures, dotted here and there with solitary pines, which seemed like skirmishers thrown out from the dense masses which stood in closely-serried ranks above. To the left, on this side the stream, the pine-woods were yet more dense, falling in dark sunless masses almost perpendicularly from the slopes which lead to the Schwarze See down to the bed of the stream. Above these dark masses a single pinnacle of sunlit snow rose into the pure blue ether. The dark line of the pine-forest cut it sharply across, and seemed to separate it from this lower world, while it intensified its brightness. It was something 'mystic, wonderful,' held aloft as if by the hand of enchantment—the most awe-inspiring of all summits, the peak of the Matterhorn.

It was the first time Glyn had had much time to think. He had striven hard to shut out the past. He never looked into a newspaper. He had even forbidden his sister to

mention anything she might hear connected with Blanche Venables, so that on this subject he was in utter ignorance; and it was by no means likely that his wife would touch on topics at all calculated to reawaken feelings which she knew had once stirred her husband's heart to its inmost depths.

Presently Glyn rose, and strode away up the path which led to the point he had selected for his sketch. As he approached the skirts of the pine-forest, he became conscious of the presence of some figures in the deep shadows cast by the pines on to the steep slope of grass.

One, the nearest to him, was a lady, sitting a little off the path, apparently contemplating the glorious view. A book with open leaves lay on the grass at her side, but the attractions of the scene had evidently weaned the reader's attention from its pages. Some distance down the slope a young girl, apparently a maid, was gathering wild-flowers, and near her a guide lay on the grass lazily smoking a cigarette.

Glyn took in all this without any feeling of

interest. Indeed, in his present mood he wished rather to avoid strangers than encounter them. When a startling surprise is in store for us, it is difficult to define the exact moment that it dawns upon us. Something in the half-averted face of the lady made him look again. The second look caused a sudden sensation of wonderment, and brought him to a dead stop.

The cessation of the footsteps, rather than the footsteps themselves, made the lady turn her head, and Glyn looked once more on the face of Blanche Venables.

For a few brief moments they gazed into each other's eyes, neither knowing what to say; but, however much of outward calm they displayed, there was wild tumult within. Glyn's heart beat with almost audible throbs, and Blanche rose quickly, as though she would have moved away.

But whatever the turmoil of his breast, whatever the bitterness of his blighted life, Glyn was a gentleman still. He had known this girl intimately, had received endless kindnesses from her, and was now brought

thus strangely into her presence in a remote land. He advanced with outstretched hand.

Blanche touched it coldly, with a still colder lifting of the head, and a touch of scorn on her lips. She was deadly pale; her face was worn and thin, and now, for the first time, Glyn perceived that she was in deep mourning.

'Miss Venables—I—this is a strange meeting. Forgive me if I am wrong, but I do not know whether I am to address you by your old name.'

'Mr. Beverley, I do not know what you mean!'

There was a still more lofty look of scorn, and another movement as if to depart.

However deep the wrong she had done him, it was horrible, unnatural, to meet and part like this. He glanced at her dress.

'Let me at least say how shocked I am to see you in mourning. I have been long absent from home. I have purposely heard nothing. I do trust it is not——'

'It is my father,' she answered, inter-

rupting him. 'Pray spare me any reference to it. I cannot bear it.'

'I should have respected your grief had I known of it, believe me, Miss Venables. Since we *have* met, at least let me ask if you still bear that name.'

'I am utterly at a loss to understand you. Why should I not still bear it?'

'You *will* not understand me!' Glyn answered. 'You must know that I could not remain ignorant of the marriage you contemplated two months ago.'

'That *I* contemplated? Mr. Beverley, I can hardly think you would choose a time like this to actually insult me, but your words almost drive me to think so! This meeting is an unfortunate mischance. We had better end it.'

She made a little movement with her hand, as if to prevent his interrupting her. Then she went on:

'I had wished—I had striven hard, in spite of what has occurred, to hold you in friendly remembrance. I made excuses for you. If anything, I pitied you, though I

could not wholly forget the insult. Let there be an end of this now!'

Again she made a movement to depart. This time Glyn caught her hand and held it, in spite of her effort to withdraw it.

'Miss Venables, you shall not speak to me in this way. You shall not do me this injustice. *I* insult *you!* *I* an object for your pity! It is you who have done me the most cruel wrong it is possible for a woman to commit!'

'This is intolerable!' Blanche answered, a hot flush of anger rising to her brow. 'Will you force upon me the indignity of reminding you of your words to me in your own studio —words which I was weak enough to believe as sincere as a man could utter? And are you not the husband of my friend? Oh that I should be so mad, so weak, as to say all this!'

Glyn dropped her hand.

'There is some dreadful mystery here,' he said, passing his fingers rapidly across his forehead. 'I was never false to you. I would have given my life for you—all too willingly. It was your own act which drove

me to do what I did. Your own letter, which has blasted my whole future life. As Heaven is my witness this day, I have not one hope in all the long and dreadful future.'

Blanche turned suddenly, and fixed her eyes full upon him with a look so intense that it seemed to read his soul.

'My own letter?' she said. 'I wrote no letter. I half suspect—tell me quickly what you mean.'

'You forget, Miss Venables, you *did*. I saw it with my own eyes, else I would not have believed it.'

'What letter?'

'The letter announcing your approaching marriage with D'Eyncourt. I saw it, I tell you.'

She gave another impatient gesture. 'Mr. Beverley, I think you must be mad. I never dreamed of such a marriage—never wrote such a letter. Let me go on.'

'My God! what does it all mean?' Glyn gasped. 'Miss Venables, I cannot disbelieve my own eyesight. I cannot believe that you would wilfully tell me a lie. We

may never have another chance of an explanation. We may be interrupted here. Let us go into this wood.'

The guide had finished his cigarette, and was fast asleep on the sunny slope. The maid was wandering further away, intent upon her flowers. Above the solemn pines, the snow-streaked pyramid of the Matterhorn rose into the silent air. Cattle-bells, softened by distance, tinkled in the pastures far, far below. The stream roared hoarsely in the gorge. Insects plied their busy trade of life amid the grass. Butterflies, crimson, golden, scarlet, and purple—exquisite flowers of the air—dropped and kissed their loved ones, the flowers of the earth. And in the midst of all the surpassing loveliness, two trouble-tossed hearts passed into the shadows of the pines, thinking that for them at least earth held no more of happiness.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE TRACK OF THE AVALANCHE.

Glyn led the way up a small track which diverged from the broad path into the deeper recesses of the forest. Blanche followed without a word. The consciousness, for the first time, came upon her that she might have been guilty of a terrible injustice to the man she loved.

They came to a broad open space—the probable path of an avalanche, for the pines were torn short off, and huge whitened trunks lay about in wild confusion. But here, as if the earth strove to compensate itself for long absence from the sun, the luxuriance of vegetation was greater even than on the outskirts of the forest. Nature

had it all her own way. A footstep seldom intruded on this pine-encircled spot. The wondrous flowers grew for the butterflies and bees, not to gladden the heart of man.

Glyn pointed to a fallen pine, and his companion sat down upon it, he placing himself by her side.

There was silence for some minutes. At length Glyn said, 'I don't know what to say to you now that I have brought you here. I feel that anything I can say is useless—indeed, situated as I am, is wrong. But we must at least get to the bottom of this mystery. You tell me you never wrote a letter announcing your engagement.'

'Never.'

'What will you say, then, when I tell you that I saw the letter to which I refer, and which has changed my whole life, on Mrs. Byng's—on—my wife's breakfast-table? That I saw your own handwriting?'

'Did you read the letter?'

'No, but I was told I might. Indeed, my first impulse prompted me to do so, but the horror of the thought that you had given

yourself to another was enough, without seeing your own words in confirmation.'

'But the contents could not have confirmed such a thing, for I never wrote it.'

'There is the mystery. You know, or perhaps you do not know, that Miss Maitland was fond of Captain D'Eyncourt. I happened to have discovered it accidentally. She was in Bruton Street at the time. She read the letter. You will perhaps believe that I could not be mistaken in the contents when I tell you that it drove her to attempt suicide.'

'Suicide! Is it possible?'

'I should never have mentioned this under happier circumstances. I only do so now to show you the effect of that letter on others beside myself. I know the secret is safe with you.'

'Poor Sib—poor dear Sib! Oh, Mr. Beverley, what does it all mean? What *can* it mean? You must believe that I tell you the truth.'

She sat with hands clasped in humble entreaty, her eyes swimming in tears. Glyn

sat looking her full in the face. His own lips were tight and drawn, but there was a quiver of the muscles which showed the trouble that worked within, and presently it got quite beyond his control.

Blanche sat by in unspeakable misery. Oh, if she only had the right to comfort him! She dared not trust herself even to touch his hand.

'Mr. Beverley, in pity do not give way like this! What can I say to you? For your own sake—for mine, try to bear it!'

'Forgive me,' said Glyn, looking up. 'It is wretched weakness to break down in this way. But we cannot let this matter rest here. Tell me, have you no notion what it all means? It must have been your letter, whatever the contents were. I could not mistake your writing.'

'That is the strange part of it. I did write at that time, but it was to say how persecuted I had been by Captain D'Eyncourt; how much my dear father wished me to marry him, and how impossible I felt it to accede to his wishes. It was the only subject on which

we ever differed. But, then, it all arose from love. He dreaded to leave me unprotected.'

'But D'Eyncourt was with you wherever you went, I was told.'

'He would persist in coming, although he saw I did not wish it. It was for this reason —to get rid of him—that I proposed the trip to Naples. But he followed us even there. Why did you not write as you promised?'

'I wrote twice. Do you mean to tell me you did not get my letters?'

'No, I never had one.'

'Is it possible? Oh, how cruelly I have misjudged you! Can I ever forgive myself? But what does it mean? You returned to Rome after going to Naples. You should have found my letters there.'

'I did not. Not a line ever reached me.'

A dark thought crossed Glyn's mind.

'Did Captain D'Eyncourt have anything to do with your letters?' he asked.

'Not that I am aware of. Yet, stay—let me think. Yes, I remember, when we returned to Rome, we went to another hotel.

I asked him to call at the former one for our letters.'

Their eyes met, and the same thought flashed into the minds of both.

'It is not possible that he was guilty of such villainy as to intercept your letters?' Glyn said.

'Surely he could not be; besides, what could have been his motive?'

'Motive or not, I can see no other solution of this mystery. But that other letter. He could not possibly have forged it; it could not be——'

He stopped suddenly. The horrible thought crossed his mind that perhaps his wife had done this. The thought was too dreadful to contemplate. Yet the solution of the mystery lay between her and D'Eyncourt. He groaned aloud.

'Oh, if I had not been so precipitate!' he exclaimed.

'It is terrible if you do not love her. It will ruin your life.'

'My whole life,' moaned Glyn.

'But what could have induced you? I

cannot conceive anything tempting you to such a course.'

'Do not judge me harshly. It is bad enough to reflect on my folly—my crime. You must not reproach me. You do not know how I was tempted. Miss Venables, it is an insult to say this to you now; but even you do not know how intensely I have loved you — how my whole soul, from the first moment I knew you, has been centred in you. I had no thought or hope apart from you—no joy in anything else in this world. Do not stop me now. I must tell you all. I shall never have another chance. Even when you forbade me to speak to you of my love, I could not relinquish hope. I worked hard; for my only thought was that if I gained a high position in my profession, I might be thought worthy of you. Then came that bitter disappointment at the Academy. My pictures were turned out.'

'I heard it. I cannot tell you how grieved I was,' Blanche said softly.

'It preyed on my mind to such an extent that I became morbid. It was not only the

thought of rejection, but what it involved. It destroyed my hope of gaining you. Still I resolved not to give way. I determined to work still harder. In the midst of this came a commission from Mrs. Byng to paint her portrait. Of course I was thrown much with her. She was kind and sympathetic in every way, but it was she who first unsettled my mind about you and D'Eyncourt.'

Blanche moved uneasily, but she did not speak.

'Well, it is useless troubling you with details. It can do no good now. My mother was taken ill—seriously ill. Change was necessary for her, the doctor ordered her away, but—it is useless to conceal the fact—I had not the money wherewith to send her; at least, I could not well spare it. I was worried to death by small troubles, which told upon me in the morbid state into which I had fallen. In the midst of this came the fatal news that you were about to marry D'Eyncourt. It nearly drove me mad. I broke down utterly in the presence of the widow one day, and then, in a moment of

mad impulse—knowing that she loved me—I took the fatal step.'

Blanche did not speak. She had no words of comfort to utter.

'I repented it the moment the step was taken, bitterly repented it. The memory of the night which followed will never leave me. I realized then more than ever how intensely dear you were to me, even though, as I believed, you had given yourself to that man. I thought, even if I never saw you, that the only happiness I could know would be to be true to your memory.'

Still Blanche did not move or speak. She sat with half-averted face, every word that Glyn uttered thrilling her heart to its inmost depths.

'That is all over now,' he continued. 'The bitter part of it is that I must shut out even the memory of you from my heart; and I have striven to do so—Heaven knows how earnestly, even in this last miserable month!'

He dropped his head upon his hands again. There was still no word from Blanche. She seemed turned to stone.

Suddenly he rose up with clenched fingers, and with bitter anger on his brow.

'As to that man,' he cried, 'if he has done this thing, may curses light on him! If ever we meet——'

Blanche grasped his arm and gazed in his face imploringly.

'Hush!' she said; 'violence can do no good. We are in the hands of God. Let us strive to be patient.'

The butterflies danced in the air, the bees were busy with the flowers; huge grasshoppers chirruped loudly in the rich undergrowth; the brisk lizard sunned himself on the lichened rock hard by; and, in the midst of all this life and sunshine, these two still sat side by side on the fallen pine, with faces in which was written the word 'Despair.'

Presently Blanche spoke.

'We must not meet again. I could not trust myself. This meeting has shown me my weakness.'

'What shall you do?' Glyn asked.

'I don't know. Only that I shall leave Zermatt to-morrow. I think I shall go back

to England—perhaps to Lupton. If I can summon courage, it would be the best thing. I must busy myself with the people there. I have been away too long. There are many ways in which I can perhaps do good, and—divert my thoughts. It is best for me.'

'You have not told me what brought you here. It is marvellous that I should have come upon you in this way. Have you been here long? But that you cannot have been, or we should have met before.'

'I have been wandering from place to place. After my terrible loss I could not settle anywhere. My first impulse was to return home; but then——'

'Yes?'

'There came a letter from Sib, and—I could not go home after that.'

'I see—I see. God forgive me!'

'No; I do not mean a reproach—not now.'

'Well, well. You are all goodness still. But you will forgive my asking about your father now. When was it?'

'At Naples—almost suddenly. Oh, do

not let me dwell on it! When I heard the news from England, I felt that I must seek some change of scene; inaction was unbearable. I came here by the merest chance. Now that I have seen you, I feel better able to return home. That is the best thing for me, I know. And you—what will you do?'

'I have but one thing to do—to unravel this mystery. If it is as I suspect, God help the evil-doers! They will have no pity from me. You tell me to be patient, but I will also be just. People cannot be allowed to escape the consequences of such a foul wrong as this. Justice is not yet dead, thank Heaven!'

There was another silence; then Blanche rose.

'I will go now,' she said.

'Not the least bitter part of it is,' continued Glyn, 'that I must not even see you off to-morrow.'

'It is better so, believe me. We must part here—now. I am glad to have had this explanation—more glad than I can express;

but it has shown me that I am only a very, very weak and erring woman.'

'The best and dearest that ever lived!' broke forth from Glyn.

'No, no; you must not say that to me. Let me go now.'

'I must at least walk with you to the end of the wood.'

'Yes, if you will.'

Not another word was said. When they emerged into the open space, Blanche stopped and put her hand in Glyn's.

'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye.'

She turned and called her maid, and went away down the path, followed by the guide.

Glyn stood gazing after her until she was out of sight. Then he turned and went back into the shadow of the wood.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

'THE idea of your giving up sketching, and following us up here, Glyn! I am so glad you are come, though. The Atkinsons want us to go on over the Theodule with them. The guides tell me it is as easy as possible. I should so like to go. This is much the best place to start from, and we could send back for our traps.'

This was up at the Riffel, where Glyn had arrived that afternoon, much to his wife's amazement.

'Laura, we will not talk about the Theodule. I have something very serious to say to you.'

She looked up in surprise. The more

than ordinary gravity of her husband's face seemed to strike her with a chill. She seated herself on the edge of the little French bedstead, for the conversation took place in the small chamber which she had succeeded in securing in this usually overcrowded hotel.

'What is it, Glyn?'

He fixed his eyes upon her steadily.

'I have seen Blanche Venables this morning,' he said.

Laura turned as white as the coverlet upon which she was seated. Her cheeks seemed literally to shrink in. For a moment she could not speak.

'Blanche Venables!' she at length ejaculated.

'Yes.'

His own emotion was scarcely less than his wife's. The issue of this conversation was so momentous, affecting his whole future life. Was he to discover that his wife was utterly false and bad, or should he be again able to take her to his heart as one who had done him no wrong?

'I have had a long conversation with her. She tells me she was never engaged to D'Eyncourt, never had the remotest intention of marrying him. Why did you tell me that letter you showed me was an announcement of her intended marriage?'

'Because it was, Glyn.'

She was beginning to recover herself. She said the words confidently, looking up in his face.

'If it was, it was a forgery,' he said. '*Do you know who forged it?*'

It was a direct, uncompromising question, put in plain words. If the wife had had the courage there and then to confess the truth, it is possible that in the after-years she might have been forgiven. But her nature was weak, her conscience elastic. She had recourse to a lie to ward off her husband's righteous wrath.

'No, Glyn. How could I possibly know who forged it? What a very dreadful thing!'

He placed his finger under her pretty dimpled chin, and turned her face up to his

still more. She met his gaze with an unmoved countenance, almost with a look of childish innocence.

'*On your solemn word of honour this is true?*'

'*On my solemn word of honour, it is true.*'

Glyn looked steadily at her for several seconds.

'Laura, this is not a time to trifle or deceive. The words you speak at this moment may affect the happiness of your whole life. Why did you turn so pale when I told you I had seen Blanche Venables?'

The imminent danger was past—the wife was quite herself again by this time.

'Is it not natural that I should feel a shock at suddenly hearing that you had met Blanche, knowing what your feeling was towards her? The thought has haunted me night and day that if you met again you might continue to care more for her than for me.'

'Was that the real reason?'

'Yes. Why should you doubt me? How could I possibly know anything of the

forgery? It is difficult now to believe it. Have you any idea who forged it?'

'I have, but at present I wish to say nothing.'

'At least you will acquit me of any participation in the fraud. How cruel of you to suspect me! You will never do so again, will you?'

A great sigh broke from Glyn.

'Ah,' he said, 'thank God that load is off my mind!' Then he stooped and kissed his wife, and turned away and looked out of the window.

Mrs. Beverley went to the washstand, poured out a glass of water, and drank it off. It was fortunate her husband was not looking. Her hand trembled so that she could hardly hold the glass. It was the reaction of the last five minutes.

Glyn remained gazing from the window. Below was the sunlit shoulder of the mountain upon which the hotel was built. Immediately beyond its verge the mountain-side dropped abruptly to the pine woods a thousand feet beneath. Beyond the pines

again he saw the roofs and smoke of Zermatt. 'Was she there still,' he thought, 'or would she hasten her departure and get away at once?' He hoped the latter. It is better so, he thought. Then his eyes wandered away up the very pastures which he had climbed that morning, and with a sickening of the heart he thought he could even detect the break in the forest where he had sat with Blanche. It was more than he could bear. His eyes still soared upwards, to the point where he had commenced his sketch a few days before. It was all useless now. He could never mount that pathway again. It would drive him mad to sit there alone. Still upward his gaze travelled, to the snow-fields of the Furgen Glacier, to the dark, sharp point of the Hornli, to the still majesty of the great mountain itself. The afternoon sunlight was coming round on to the northern face, casting long shadows of intense blue adown the slopes of snow, and turning the snow itself to gold. His gaze lighted on the topmost crest, fourteen thousand feet aloft in the blue air. There was nothing beyond but

the sky so still and pure. 'Ah! if we were all as pure as that,' thought Glyn, 'and if some of its serenity could fall upon our troubled hearts!'

His wife touched him on the arm.

'Will you go over the Theodule, Glyn?' she asked.

'Yes, but we will not come back here. We will go on into Italy.'

'But what about your sketch, dear?'

'My sketch may gladden the eyes of the good old woman up at the châlet yonder. I shall not trouble myself about it.'

His wife did not press the matter further. She had her own reasons for not doing so, and cogent ones they were. Neither did she ask what had become of Blanche Venables, great friends as they once had been. Both husband and wife understood why silence on this subject was best.

So Glyn and his friends went on over the Theodule next day, and thus another effort to become grea in art was frustrated.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BY THE SEA-SHORE.

It was evident, to those who regarded the question indifferently, that old Mrs. Beverley's days were numbered. It is true she had rallied in the fresh pure air of Brighton ; but it was only for a time. The shock of recent events, acting on a comparatively weak constitution, had been too much for her. At the end of the second month by the seaside Kate found, to her consternation, that her mother was scarcely stronger than she had been when they left town, and this could not go on for any length of time.

Kate had a hard time, for she may be said to have had two invalids on her hands. Sib Maitland seemed almost stricken to death.

She had never recovered from the shock of that letter and of her own rash act. Her pretty pale face, paler now than ever, was like a lily struck by the cold winds of later spring. In one sense, her delicacy brought her relief, for it was a sufficient excuse for her to remain on with Kate. To her she still clung, as the one person in the world to whom she could open her heart and lay bare its secrets.

'Kate dear,' said Mrs. Beverley one day, as she was being wheeled about in a bath-chair, her daughter and Sib walking by her side, 'I think this place is too much for me. There is such incessant bustle. All these carriages and people worry me sadly.'

Kate had felt this for a long time, but they were still dependent on Glyn for ways and means; and until his return she did not see her way to any change.

'We will see about a move when Glyn returns, dear,' she answered.

'When do you think that will be?' questioned the old lady impatiently. 'He seems to have been a long time abroad.'

'The last we heard of them, you know, was from Zermatt. They did not know where they were going from there. I suppose we shall hear soon.'

Laura had taken care that they should want for nothing while she was away. She had insisted on supplying Glyn with money for them.

'You can pay me back when you return, and you get to work again,' she said laughingly. 'All you make can go to them now, if you are not too proud to live on me.'

She had always been profuse, even lavish, in her expenditure, so this proposition was nothing new. Indeed, Glyn had no choice but to accept the help now. He had sold his independence on his wedding-day—at least, until he should rise in his profession. If that ever came to pass, the money would probably roll in fast enough, for our magnates in art build their palaces now, and 'dwell' literally in 'marble halls.'

Still, Kate was not in a position to decide on any move, and she did not like to trouble Glyn with dismal accounts of her mother

while he was on his wedding-trip. She trusted that in change of scene he would find that cure for the heartache, from which she so well knew he had suffered ever since that letter came which had wrought such disastrous consequences to both Glyn and Sib Maitland. So with growing anxiety Kate waited for her brother's return.

But a good angel was to drop down from the clouds in the shape of Blanche Venables. The meeting with Glyn at Zermatt had roused her from the lethargy into which she had fallen after her father's death. Although an impassable barrier was set up between herself and Glyn, it was some relief to her to think that he was not unworthy of the love she had given him, that he had at least cleared himself from the suspicion of deceit and treachery. She could now dwell on the memory of those happy days at Lupton with a softened feeling towards him. Although she felt most acutely at times that

> 'A sorrow's crown of sorrow is rememb'ring happier things,'

she had not the additional sting of feeling

'wroth with one we love,' which indeed 'works like madness on the brain.'

Blanche came straight home after that meeting, determined to face her sorrow with a brave heart. To one in her desolate position, it indeed required bravery to look with any degree of calmness on the future. No words can express the feelings which tortured her heart when she once more set foot on English soil, and felt that she was not only fatherless, but, by some inexplicable treachery yet to be fathomed, had been robbed of the one to whom she would have clung in her bitter sorrow. Naturally her heart turned to Glyn's sister and to poor Sib Maitland. She might be of some use here, she thought, and so she went straight to Brighton.

She was shocked at the change in Sib —scarcely less so at the condition of Mrs. Beverley. She took the physician aside and questioned him closely.

'I need not disguise the truth from you,' the doctor said. 'I do not think the old lady will live a month. I have not told her

daughter. She will come to know it soon enough, poor girl! As to Miss Maitland, I don't know what to say. Miss Beverley tells me in confidence she has had some disappointment. She is delicate, undoubtedly, but people don't die of love, and she may get over it.'

'But this gay place. Is it good for them?'

'I should certainly recommend a quieter place for Mrs. Beverley. A softer air would also, I think, be better for Miss Maitland. Her chest is delicate. Why not try Devonshire?'

The result of this conversation was that within a week Blanche had carried them all off to the shores of Torbay. The soft air and cool breezes of Paignton, the pure blue sky, the freedom from noise and bustle, were an infinite relief to the old lady, and even Sib seemed refreshed. She had always been a lover of Nature, and, in her sad state of mind, the gaiety of Brighton had jarred upon her to a greater extent than even Kate had fancied.

'I want to ask you a question, Blanche,'

said Sib, a day or two after their arrival, as they were exploring the coast beyond Paignton.

They had walked over the breezy headland which lies between Paignton Harbour and Goodrington, and had wandered on to the cliffs on the other side of the little bay.

Blanche had a dim consciousness of what was coming.

'Let us sit down in this pretty little pebbly nook, then,' she said. 'We can talk here as long as we like without a chance of interruption. What a change from Brighton, with its perpetual restless life. This is quite perfect.'

It was indeed a lovely spot. Behind them the broken, irregular cliffs rose up to the grassy slopes which border the road to Dartmouth. At their feet the white, shelving pebbles stretched downward to the sea, which lay palpitating in the noonday beams. There was just the quiver of a breeze on the surface, and where the tiny wavelets broke upon the strand, the sunshine glistened in

points of diamond light. A short distance out beds of dark seaweed were seen through the exquisite transparency of the water, turning it to a rich purple tint, and beyond the sea deepened and deepened in tone until, on the far horizon, it turned to a pure cobalt, and cut the white summer clouds of the far distance with a distinct but beautifully-softened line, broken only by the sails of distant ships, which loomed darkly against the radiance of the clouds. Away to the left the red headland they had crossed stood up boldly, with a wealth of leafage on its crest, while to the right the coast stretched away in a succession of woods and bluffs and pebbly bays toward the bold promontory of Berry Head.

Blanche had seated herself on the shingle. Sib lay half reclining against her and had taken her hand. The quiet of the spot was so intense that, but for the lapping of the waves, there was not a sound, and for a few moments neither spoke.

'Blanche, why did you not marry him?' Sib suddenly asked, without taking her

dreamy gaze from the deep blue line of the horizon.

'Because I never had the slightest intention of doing so,' Blanche answered.

'Then, why did you write that letter?'

'I did not write it.'

There was a sudden movement, and Sib looked up to her with wondering eyes.

'What do you mean?' she said.

'Before I answer you, will you tell me if you remember the contents of that letter very distinctly?'

'Yes, very distinctly — very distinctly indeed.'

'Will you tell me what it contained, word for word, as nearly as you can remember?'

'What a strange question for you to ask! You must know quite as well as I.'

'For all that, I do ask.'

She took out a small pencil and pocket-book, and prepared to write.

'Now, Sib, I am going to put down your recollections of that letter, so be as accurate as you can.'

'I am not likely to make any great mis-

take, but I cannot understand what you mean.'

'No matter; I will explain by-and-by. How did it begin?'

'"My dearest Laura."'

'Well?'

Sib spoke with a great effort, but she went on.

'I can't give you the exact words, Blanche, only their purport. It went on to say that, after all the struggles you had gone through, you had at length made up your mind to marry Captain D'Eyncourt.'

'Yes?'

Sib made another effort, and continued:

'That, as your father had so set his heart on it, you felt you must yield, and that you thought you had judged George too harshly.'

'Yes?'

'That he had been very devoted to you, and, in deference to your father's wishes, you had consented that the marriage should take place soon.'

'Is that all?'

'Except something about your going on to

Naples, and a reference to your having loved him very dearly at one time,' Sib answered in a faltering voice.

Blanche put up her pocket-book, in which she had been making notes.

'Sib, would you be surprised to hear that letter was a forgery?' she said.

'A forgery!' exclaimed her cousin, starting up. 'Did he not ask you to marry him?'

'Yes—he asked me to marry him.'

Sib sank down on the beach again, and a shudder swept over her.

'He has asked me many times,' Blanche went on. 'Of course he knew my dear father's wishes, and it was difficult to shake him off.'

'But why would you not marry him? Laura told me you were once engaged to him. Why was it broken off?'

'Because I had reason to believe he was utterly false and bad. I have never changed that opinion. I wish you to think so too, Sib.'

'No, no; do not say that! I would rather not think so. I would rather think you are mistaken—even now.'

'One day I will tell why I think so.'

'No, no; I do not care to hear. But about that letter—that dreadful letter. If you did not write it, who did?'

'I believe he did, but I do not know.'

'You judge him very harshly, Blanche.'

'I have reason to do so. You know how dearly I once loved him. How I gave him all the intense love of my then girlish heart. How the awakening from my dream seemed to change my very nature—for a time, at least. He has been the one black spot on my life, for even now he has—— Oh, Sib, if you are weak enough to love him after all I have said, after all he has done, I pity you from my inmost heart! My darling child, let me entreat you to root out every grain of fondness for him, for his love is simply pollution!'

'Oh, Blanche, Blanche, you must not talk in this way! I cannot bear it.'

Did she still think that he might come back to her, loving and penitent, some day in the far-off future? Did she still make excuses for him, and refuse to believe in his

dishonour, in spite of all? Until his own lips confessed his falsehood, she could not bring herself to believe it. There must have been some strong motive which she did not know. He must love her still. If not, there was no truth in life. Poor Sib!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TWO SAD HEARTS.

'I DON'T wish to awaken painful remembrances, Sib, but I do think it would be better if you would tell me all about it. I have long suspected there was something between you. I little thought how deeply your feelings were involved. Tell me when it first began.'

'I do not mind telling you now that you know my secret. You do not know how it distressed me to keep it from you before. It was at the Fortescues' that it first began. There were a great many people there, but I found that Captain D'Eyncourt used to single me out, and seemed to like talking to me better than to anyone else. I was very

much surprised at first, but of course I could not help feeling flattered, and I soon grew to think more and more of him. I had never received such attention from anyone before. It seemed so strange to me; I was so young, and he so courted by everyone. I had never met anyone so clever or so handsome before. You may think how soon, how very soon, he won my heart.'

Sib's head drooped lower and lower as she uttered these words. Her cousin passed her arm round her, and held her in a close embrace.

'He told me that he loved me better than all the world, but that I must on no account say a word, as it would ruin his prospects with his uncle, from whom he expected several thousands a year. This uncle, he said, wished him to marry you. At any rate, he was to make a good match, and the fact of marrying a penniless girl like me would be fatal.'

'And at that very time he was trying his best to bring about the engagement with me again. I believe now that was merely for

the sake of the money he knew I should have, for I have reason to think his affairs are in a sad state. Oh, it was shameful!'

'Do you mean that he wants money?' asked Sib, looking up quickly.

'Very badly, I believe.'

Sib caught at another straw. He might have been driven by causes beyond his control to seek a rich wife. He might still love her better than anyone, but could not afford to marry her. It was attributing mean and sordid motives to him, but his love was what she craved. Sib's love was her 'whole existence.' If she once loved a man, she would have continued to love him, even if he proved to be a thorough-paced scoundrel.

'Do not let us talk any more about it, Blanche; I cannot bear it. Let me think as well of him as I can. It is wretchedness enough as it is.'

She rose, and began pacing along the beach towards the far end of the bay. Blanche did not follow. Perhaps she was half vexed that her words had failed in their effect. In her strong sense of rectitude, she

could not understand Sib's weaker nature, which could feel no indignation even now, only cruel suffering.

Another sound broke upon Blanche's ear —the crunching of gravel beneath a man's heavy footstep. She looked up, and her own heart stood still, for it was Glyn Beverley.

He came forward and shook hands without a word, then seated himself on the shingle by her side.

'You are surprised to see me,' he said quietly.

Blanche could hardly find words to answer. The shock of this sudden meeting set her trembling in every limb. There was no delight; that was the pity of it. His presence now must always be pain to her.

'I am,' she answered. 'I thought you were abroad.'

'I came back unexpectedly on some matters of business which I have to transact for my wife. I was bound to see my mother. I arrived an hour ago. I did not, of course, know, until I reached England, that you had

taken possession of them. It is wonderfully kind of you; but that is only like you.'

'Please do not say that. It is the least I could do after their kindness to Sib. Besides you must not say such things to me now. I cannot bear it.'

'No,' said Glyn, laughing bitterly. 'It is part of my penance that, however much I may think of your goodness, I must hold my tongue. I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that my silence is not misconstrued. Shall I not?'

'Yes.

'Then I will try to be silent, whatever happens. I should not have come here now, only, as you were here, I thought it best to get this meeting over out here instead of in the house. Where is your companion? Oh, I see. I hope she is not meditating a second attempt out on the rocks there by herself.'

The words were coarsely said—coming from Glyn they were so strange. Blanche looked at him in mute surprise. There was a hard, cynical expression in his face which she had never seen there before, and now for the

first time she noticed how the face was changed. There were set and rigid lines in it that told of days and nights of misery. There was a look of enmity with all outward things. Grief either debases or ennobles. With a sudden, sharp pang, Blanche felt that in this case it was the former.

'I do not like you to talk of her in that way,' she said.

'Then I will not. It was a brutal remark, but the fact is, everything seems out of joint with me. I am not the same man I was, I know.'

He began picking up pebbles and throwing them listlessly down into the water, which, all white and shining, came slowly up towards where they sat. The ineffable lustre of the sunlit waves seemed suddenly to strike him, and arrested his hand.

'What marvellous beauty!' he exclaimed. 'What *is* the meaning of this awful glory of the world with such darkened hearts to look upon it? Turn where we will, there is nothing but beauty, nothing but sorrow. What can it mean?'

'You did not say that a few months ago. Our lives are not all dark. You forget the sunny spots in yours.'

'They have been as brief as a gleam of sunshine. And what is my life now? So dark that those exquisite fleecy clouds, that pure azure sea, which would at one time have sent an absolute thrill of delight through me, are positive pain. I am not selfishly dwelling on my own grief only. Look at that poor girl yonder. What is her future? What yours?'

'The present is painful enough, Heaven knows; but I trust — God knows how sincerely I trust—to make the future at least bearable. Not the least part of my pain is to see you, who were so bright and trustful and happy, so changed.'

'You have nothing to reproach yourself with in that. It was my own headstrong folly. No one is to blame but myself, except that man who has brought evil on all of us.'

'Have you seen him?'

'No.'

'And you have discovered nothing about that letter?'

'There is nothing to discover. I am as certain that he wrote it as that I am sitting here. It has all come upon me like a revelation since I saw you last.'

'In what way?'

'He read your secret with regard to me. He thought that if I were disposed of, and out of the way, he would have a better chance with you. Quite possibly he had also learned the widow's fondness for me. It was a neat little plot. If I felt you were lost to me, in a weak moment I might take the widow, and then his chance might come. This is the vague outline I have sketched. There are links wanting which I cannot yet discover; but he has succeeded—curse him!'

'Surely he could not have plotted all this. It was so vague, so unlikely to happen. Besides, how could he have known so much?'

'Ah, there is a mystery I hope yet to fathom. How could he have known it? I have questioned my wife closely. I thought

—Heaven forgive me!—that she might have been his accomplice.'

'Oh, no, no!'

'It was a horrible thought, I admit, but I do not think so now. She has given me the most solemn assurances, otherwise I could not have lived with her another hour.'

'But shall you see him?'

'I had intended to see him, but what would be the use? If I charged him with forging a letter to my wife, he would simply tell me that I lied, or would ask for proofs. I should have to confess that I had no proofs, only strong suspicions. He would tell me, in his insolent way, that suspicions did not affect him, and probably bid me good-day. No, I must have firmer grounds before I charge him with this. He would turn the tables on me, and probably laugh in my face.'

'I think you are right. Besides, what is the use now? It would only make things more painful, and, after all, he has defeated his own ends, for I could never look upon his face again with any degree of patience. Do not let us talk of it, it is too painful.'

'And yet to some extent it is a necessity. I feel better already for having talked the matter over with you. I will avoid the subject in future, unless I want your advice.'

There was a pause of several minutes. The sea was up now, within a yard or two of their feet, turning the dry pebbles to glistening jewels, upon which the sunlight, shining through the water, played in a filigree of purest silver. Presently Blanche broke the silence.

'How did you know we were here? There was not time for you to have heard.'

'I went direct from Folkestone to Brighton, and was astonished to find my mother had departed. You had left an address for the letters which they gave me. I heard you were with them. I concluded, therefore, it was your arrangement. Kate tells me it was. I don't know how to thank you sufficiently.'

'Please don't say anything about that,' she answered hurriedly. 'Understand once for all that it will always be my greatest pleasure to do anything I can for them.'

'Ah, that will be some relief to me at least,

for I must return to Paris in a day or two.'

'Your wife is there?'

'Yes. She has her new friends there, and seems quite happy. At least she was content for me to come alone—seemed to prefer it, in fact. It would be a good thing if we could all take life so cheerily. This troublesome tide is as pertinacious as in the days of Canute. It *will* come on. We must shift our ground.'

'We had better call Sib, I think. We ought to be returning.'

'As you will. After all, I am glad you were here. I think you have done me good. I felt my very nature changing, my heart turning to gall and bitterness.'

'Do not let that feeling come on you. There is but one course—to strive to do our best through all sufferings and temptations. I did not think we should meet again so soon. It was perhaps my own fault. I shall settle down at Lupton soon. I have not had the heart to go there yet. I must take Sib with me when I do.'

'Kate will miss you very much.'

'I shall be grieved to part with her, but it is a duty that must be faced. Perhaps, if Mrs. Beverley gets better, they might all come to Lupton—at least, as long as you are abroad.'

'I should like to think they were with you; but I fear my mother will never be able to go. I was shocked at the change in her.'

'I feared you would be. It struck me so, that I felt it was necessary to get her away from the noise of Brighton. She may, however, rally in this pure air.'

'We will hope so. I should like the dear old lady to have a few happy months, after all her troubles.'

'She shall, if it is in my power to bring it about. Here is Sib coming with wonderment in her eyes at your sudden appearance.'

'Poor girl! she looks like a ghost,' said Glyn. 'Did he bring this trouble upon her for mere sport and pastime, I wonder, or is it possible that he really cared for her? You will keep her with you some time, I suppose?'

'Oh yes, I hope so. They can hardly refuse me now, and she is never very happy at home. I do so hope we may be able to have your mother and sister at Lupton.'

But the 'shadow feared by man' was at hand, and the girl's hope was never to be realized.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A DEATH-BED INJUNCTION.

As they approached the villa where they had taken rooms, a boy came running out to meet them.

'Oh, miss!' he cried, addressing Blanche, 'I was sent to fetch you. The lady is very bad.'

They hurried into the house and up the stairs. Kate met them on the landing with white cheeks and streaming eyes.

'Quick, Glyn! she is very ill. Blanche dear, it is better for you not to come.'

Kate was right, for the sight which met Glyn's eyes, when he entered his mother's room, was enough to try even a strong man.

The old lady lay back on the pillow as

white as marble, and all the coverlet was stained with blood.

'She has broken a bloodvessel. Send for the doctor; quick, Kate!'

But Blanche, who anticipated the worst, from the scared look in Kate's face, had already gone. Luckily, there was one close at hand, and in a few minutes he was in the sick-room.

Restoratives were applied, the patient carefully examined, and the bed rearranged as well as it could be, without disturbing the sufferer.

'Absolute quiet is necessary, and of course careful watching,' said the doctor. 'I can say nothing about the result yet. If her constitution is good, she may get over it; but it would be wrong to conceal the fact that she is in very great danger.'

Kate wrung her hands.

'In immediate danger?' asked Glyn, concealing his emotion as well as he could.

'The next twenty-four hours will decide it one way or the other. Attend carefully to my instructions. The ice is our sheet-anchor.

Send for me at once if there is any return of the hæmorrhage.'

All individual heart-burnings were at an end in the imminent shadow of death. The four who were thus strangely linked together by the bed of sickness, vied with each other in the abnegation of self, and in the strong endeavour to comfort one another. The patient lay through the warm summer day, almost unconscious, and moaning piteously.

All that day and through the night Kate sat by her mother's bedside, while Glyn paced restlessly in the room below or snatched a few minutes' repose on a couch. Kate was deaf to all entreaties: she would not leave the sick-room, although her two friends would have gladly relieved her. No hand but hers should administer the necessary cordials or arrange the mother's pillow.

The doctor's prediction was not actually verified. At the end of the twenty-four hours there was but little change. If anything, the patient was weaker. She still lay with closed eyes, and the few low sounds which occasionally issued from her lips indi-

cated that the poor overwrought mind was wandering.

Late that night Blanche entered the room.

'You must not watch through another night, Kate. You know how gladly I will take your place, and surely you can trust me, dear.'

'I cannot leave until there is a change for the better.'

'But you will wear yourself out. I do so wish you would get some rest. Your brother wishes it too.'

'It is very good of you both, but you must not ask me. It is not that I do not trust you. I will promise you one thing: if she really sleeps as the doctor hopes, I will ask you to take my place for a little while.'

'You promise me this?'

'Yes.'

Blanche went downstairs. Glyn was at the door of the house which faced eastward and overlooked the sea. There was no moon, but the stars were shining in indescribable glory in the dark blue vault above. The sea lay in midnight slumber,

with only a slight heave on its breast, like the breathing of a sleeper.

Instinctively these two, linked so strangely together by destiny, stepped on to the lawn and looked out over the silent sea.

'What does she say?' asked Glyn.

'She will not have any help now. She says if your mother sleeps she will let me take her place.'

'And the mother?'

'Just the same, I think. How I wish I could comfort you, Glyn!'

She had got this habit at times of unconsciously calling him by his Christian name. Each time she did so it sent a thrill through his heart; but this she did not know.

'Let us go out on to the beach for a bit. We shall be within call,' he said.

It was only just across the garden. In a few seconds they were down close to the waves, which fell with a slow, melancholy lap, lap, lap, upon the sand.

'Take my arm,' said Glyn.

She could not have refused him at such a time, so absolutely did she love him. She

passed her small white hand softly through his arm.

They wandered away in silence. What could they say? There was nothing to be said in the utter hopelessness of the future, but that night, with its stars, and dim gray sea, and lapping waves, was a vivid remembrance of their after-lives.

At last she could bear it no longer. She felt her weakness, and dreaded the result.

'Had we not better go in?' she said.

Glyn turned at once.

'After all,' he said, 'it is better to understand each other, than to have lived on with bitter feelings in our hearts.'

Then they went back to the house.

At about two in the morning, Blanche was aroused by a light tap at her door, and the next moment Kate entered.

'She is sleeping so peacefully now that I thought I might venture to take a little rest,' she said.

'Oh, I am so glad,' Blanche answered. 'I will go down at once.'

Kate threw herself on her friend's bed.

She was so worn out that she slept almost immediately. Blanche went to the sick-room. The patient was slumbering quite peacefully, but looked, oh! so deadly white.

Half an hour after the door was quietly opened and Glyn stepped into the room. In the dim light he did not recognise the watcher by the bedside. He came forward softly and looked at his mother.

'Kate,' he said, 'I have come to insist on your getting some rest. I will stay here.'

'Kate went up half an hour ago,' Blanche said softly.

Glyn started.

'Miss Venables! how good of you! but do let me relieve you. I cannot bear to think of your rest being broken.'

'I shall not resign my post. You need rest more than I do. I shall think it unkind if you do not let me stay.'

'I cannot refuse you. How peaceably she seems sleeping now! I do trust the crisis is past.'

They stood on either side the bed, not far apart. A common bond of sympathy seemed

to draw them more and more closely together. Suddenly the sleeper opened her eyes. She gazed at Glyn a moment, then at Blanche. Her lips seemed striving to utter some words.

'What is it, mother?' said Glyn, stooping over her.

'Your hand,' she answered in so faint a voice that he could hardly hear. Glyn put his hand in hers. She held it fast in her poor attenuated fingers. Then she turned her eyes on Blanche, as if making a request.

Blanche took her other hand. A smile of contentment passed over the pale face. By a sudden action she brought together their two hands and pressed them both between her own. A ray of light seemed to pass over the poor clouded brain.

'Marry her, Glyn, marry her! God bless you both, and Kate!'

The heart's intense desire spoke in that last supreme moment, but the worn brain was not clear enough to remember the one bitter obstacle. A merciful God had hidden it from her, and had taken her to His rest in peace.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN BRUTON STREET.

Poor Mrs. Beverley was laid beside her husband in the churchyard of the quiet country village where he had died.

After the funeral Blanche had insisted on their all going back to Lupton, and there Glyn lingered on for a few days; but the strain was too much under the changed circumstances, and he felt it was insanity to remain.

His wife had expressed her willingness to come over to the funeral, but Glyn felt that it was better that she should not. Although he believed her innocent, a meeting between her and Blanche, under the circumstances, would not be pleasant. Now that it was all

over, however, he made up his mind to get through the business which had brought him to England as soon as he possibly could, and then rejoin his wife in Paris.

The dead mother's last act had drawn him still more closely to Blanche. There was an irony of fate about it which bewildered him. It was all hopeless gloom, turn which way he would. Where was the chink through which the light of hope could penetrate? Where the silver lining to the cloud? He failed to see the slightest indication.

He got over the parting somehow. The same dull stupor was on his brain all the way to town. His actions seemed mechanical, and apart from his inner self.

He reached his house in Bruton Street. His own now, though the fact brought no satisfaction to him. Briggs received him as usual, and bade him welcome.

'You will take luncheon at the usual time, I suppose, sir?' said the old servant, as if Glyn had been his master all his life.

'I am not sure what I shall do at present,' he answered. 'Are there any letters?'

'Yes, sir, several. They are on the writing-table in the study.'

This was the room in which Glyn had painted, and which was now to become his own especial domain.

He entered the room with a deadly sickness at his heart. Who does not know this feeling—this return to a familiar spot, when all the current of one's life is changed for the worse?

He seated himself by the table, and rested his weary head upon his hand for a few moments. As he did so, he became conscious of a number of letters on the table tied together, and all of a similar size and character. There must have been forty or fifty of them.

'Circulars, I suppose,' thought Glyn. 'Perhaps I had better look through them, though. She told me to bring over any letters.'

To his surprise, they were all addressed to himself. 'Is this the result of my marriage?' thought he. 'I am become a person of some mportance, evidently.'

He opened the first and glanced at its contents; another paper was enclosed of a more voluminous character.

For a moment he did not take in the meaning of the paper in his hand. He read it through again, and then glanced at the second paper, then back at the letter again. This was what he read:

'Regent Street, July 13, 188—.

'SIR,

'We should feel extremely obliged if you would favour us with a settlement of the enclosed account, which is very much overdue, as our business does not allow us to give such extended credit.

'We are, sir,

'Your obedient servants,

'HOWARD AND WATTS.'

Glyn glanced at the bill once more. It extended down a long strip of paper, and was carried forward to the other side. The amount at the bottom of the first page was startling to him; the total on the second page was £257 10s.

The bill was for gloves, lace, pocket-handkerchiefs, furs, mantles, etc.—a formidable array to Glyn. Here and there credit was given for amounts received, but an ever-accumulating balance was carried forward. He put down the bill in amazement, and took up the next letter, also addressed to himself.

Another account, from a jeweller, also for a large amount. Glyn paused a moment, with a new sensation of heart-sickness to which he had before been a stranger.

'What does it mean?' he exclaimed. 'Am I to understand that all these are requests for payment? What a fearful state of things!'

He felt that the ordeal must be gone through. He opened the letters one after another, with a fresh pang at his heart as the amounts met his gaze. There were bills for food, clothing, wine, hire of horses, coals, books, music—every conceivable thing.

It was evident that the tradesmen had heard of the widow's marriage, and, having failed to get the money from her, had appealed to the husband.

But what had she done with her money? She must have spent it all in pleasure. He had ascertained some time since that her income was less than her style of living had led him to suppose. When he discovered what it really was, he had given her credit for being a wonderfully good manager. He little thought that the necessaries of life—indeed, most of its luxuries—were had at the expense of the tradesmen. In many little things he had observed a looseness of principle, but he had never dreamed of this.

With a heavy sigh he set the bills before him, and, taking pencil and paper, roughly calculated the total.

It was three thousand five hundred pounds, in round numbers.

His wife's income was about eighteen hundred pounds a year.

Her total income for two years would only just cover the debts.

Glyn sat back in his chair and groaned aloud.

It was for this he had sold himself—for this

he had bartered the happiness of a life. He could never hope to pay these debts himself, and of course they must be paid. His wife's income must be given up for them.

He knew the principal could not be touched. That was to go to a cousin of her first husband at her death. She had only a life interest in it. Of course Glyn was responsible.

The thought was maddening. All the old worry about money matters would come back again, and art would be as much a phantom as ever.

He would have to support all—his wife, his sister, and himself. Not a penny of his wife's money should be touched until the tradesmen had been paid in full. On this he was determined. They would have to go into cheap lodgings again. He dreaded to think what his wife would be, cut off from the luxuries of life; yet it must be done. Debt was a thing abhorrent to Glyn's nature. He could not look a tradesman in the face if he owed him five pounds which he could not pay. It seemed to him as bad as putting his

hand into the man's pocket and stealing his purse.

Poor Glyn sat for an hour literally stunned by this last blow.

'How long is it to go on?' he groaned. 'Am I never to know peace again?'

He was interrupted by Briggs.

'Can I speak to you a moment, sir?' he asked.

'What is it, Briggs?' Glyn answered languidly, not caring to be interrupted at such a time.

Briggs glanced at the letters, and then at his master, with a look that was suspiciously like pity.

Doubtless he had known all about these 'little bills' for some time. His master appeared to him very much in the light of a victim.

Glyn was too much absorbed to notice his looks. He again asked what he wanted.

'Well, sir,' said Briggs, advancing in a hesitating way to the table, 'it's a rather delicate subject, sir. May I ask if Miss Annette is coming back with missus, sir?'

'Yes, I believe so,' said Glyn, looking up in some surprise. 'She is with her in Paris. Why do you ask?'

Briggs returned to the door, which he had left partly open, and closed it carefully. Then he walked almost on tip-toe back to the table, and glanced cautiously about him. Glyn watched him with increased wonderment, dreading some new evil.

'You see, sir, I wish to do my duty by everybody,' Briggs went on; 'but it's a serious matter to accuse anybody — more especially a party in the same 'ouse — of thieving.'

'Of thieving?' repeated Glyn. 'What on earth do you mean?'

'Well, you see, sir, I never cared to say nothing to missus, though I seen it a long while ago. Missus was, so to say, a good deal taken with Annette — a good many people is taken with her.'

'Well?'

'Well, sir, if they boxes of hers were examined, it strikes me that a good many things would come to light that have disap-

peared mysterious. Missus have often wondered where things have got to, and it made me feel uncomfortable. Housemaid and scullery-maid was suspected; but as for Miss Annette, of course she never done it.'

Briggs was verging on the ironical. Glyn thought it better to keep him to hard facts, as he was thoroughly aroused by this time.

'This is a very serious charge, Briggs. Are you quite sure of your facts?'

'Quite, sir.'

'Do you mean to tell me that Annette has been carrying on a systematic course of pilfering?'

'I should put a harder name to it, sir—say, downright robbery. Gloves and handkerchiefs, rings, and even bracelets, ain't exactly pilfering. I call it downright robbery.'

'And do you mean to say your mistress never missed these things?'

'Well, she did now and then, sir; but she was always very easy about it—thought she had dropped 'em somewhere, or something of that sort. Leastways, she never suspected Annette.'

'But why on earth didn't you tell her?'

'Well, because, as I have said before, it was a serious matter; and, besides, I wasn't quite sure of my ground—now I am.'

'May I ask what has happened to make you so confident?'

'Well, sir, I would rather not mention that.'

Briggs did not care to say that he had gratified his curiosity and confirmed his suspicions during Annette's prolonged absence by a careful inspection of the contents of her box by means of a duplicate key.

'I am very sorry indeed to hear this, Briggs. It is a sad business. What should you advise me to do?'

'I should recommend a search-warrant, sir.'

'In my wife's absence? Impossible!'

'Well, sir, perhaps not in missus's absence. She ought to be here to identify the articles.'

'Of course,' said Glyn, who was getting quite dazed again by these complications. 'She will have to come over at once,' he added, as the thought of the bills rushed back upon his mind.

'You'll excuse my having mentioned it, sir,' said Briggs apologetically, as he retreated towards the door. 'I didn't like to think you was to be imposed upon any longer.'

'Of course, Briggs; you have done quite the right thing. I feel much obliged to you. I shall not forget it.'

Briggs left the room, feeling that he had relieved his mind of a great weight. He had always liked his master, who was considerate towards servants, and consideration goes a long way with them.

Glyn sank down again in mute despair. Was everything against him? Was the end of these worries ever coming? This time he was roused to action, for in a few minutes he rose and sallied forth.

Briggs was in the hall as he passed, looking as unmoved as if the least suspicion of Annette had never crossed his mind.

'I shall not take any meals here until Mrs. Beverley arrives,' Glyn said.

'Very well, sir.'

Glyn sought the nearest telegraph-office,

and sent the following message to his wife:

'Come at once, *without fail.* Bring Annette with you, as we shall not return.'

What was he to do now? It was August, and London was a desert. He had never felt so utterly desolate in all his previous experience. One trouble seemed to succeed another, as if fate were determined to beat the very life out of him. The solitude of his own thoughts was more than he could bear. He sought the club to which Forbes belonged, and which he had himself joined. It was in vain. That easy-going young man was away in Scotland grouse-shooting, and Glyn was thrown back on his own resources. One peculiar aggravation of his position was the thought of how happy he might now have been with those loved ones at Lupton. The idea haunted him through all that afternoon. He felt a wild longing to return there, which was intensified tenfold by his solitude, but he knew the thought was madness.

It haunted him, nevertheless, through his

solitary dinner at the club, through the dull play to which, in sheer desperation, he went to get through the evening. But for his wife's anticipated arrival to-morrow, he felt he must have given way.

At a late hour he reached Bruton Street. Briggs let him in.

'There is a telegram for you in the study, sir,' he said.

Concluding it was to say his wife was coming, Glyn opened it with some indifference. It ran as follows:

'Not feeling very well. Will come Monday.'

A feeling of annoyance crossed Glyn's mind as he read this, but it was partly his own fault. To do Laura justice, she had sympathized deeply with Glyn in his sad loss, and had offered to come over to meet him on his return to town, but Glyn had put her off. It was useless, he thought, for her to undertake the journey to London merely for a few days, as he fully intended to remain abroad for an indefinite time. The discovery

of the debts, however, had put an entirely new aspect on affairs. It was, perhaps, natural that Laura should feel a little annoyed and inconvenienced by these sudden changes of plans, as, of course, she could have no idea of the cause. He hardly thought it worth while to telegraph again to insist on her coming, so he made up his mind to wait. It was on Friday night he received the telegram. The question was, how was he to pass the time until Monday?

'Nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit.' Glyn did the very thing which, morally speaking, he ought not to have done. He went to Lupton the next day.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AT LUPTON ONCE MORE.

The few days which succeeded the funeral of old Mrs. Beverley had been wet and stormy at Lupton. Glyn had hardly recognised the place under its changed aspect. The last summer had been so bright. Now all was gloom and desolation. Sir Percy dead; Blanche an orphan in more senses than one; his own mother, to whom he had been tenderly attached, no longer among them; the future darkened by his hasty marriage, and his disappointment in his profession. It was all very, very sad.

'Thank God, at least, for fine weather!' said he, as he stepped out of the train at the little country station which was the most

convenient for Lupton. 'It is cheering to see a bit of blue sky overhead.'

Glyn loved the blue sky, as we have already seen. A man must be indeed deep sunk in misery to whom it does not bring a sensation of happiness. Lifted so far above the world in its infinite purity, it seems to raise our hearts with it to a realm of happiness and peace.

All Harleyford valley was bright with the autumn fields; all the banks were resplendent in purple heather and golden gorse. Cloud-shadows moved grandly over the velvety downs which stretched away from the village into the blue mists of infinite distance. There was the red-tiled church, as of old, coming up warm and distinct against the exquisite gray-green of Lupton woods; and the white chalk roads winding up the rounded slopes, as Glyn remembered them so well in the time of roses a year ago.

He had not announced his coming, and he had brought no luggage except a small hand-bag, so he resolved on walking from the station to Lupton. He got through the

village quickly. The fancy took him to go by the path through the wood which led by the spot where he had first met Blanche, and he was not long in reaching the very place. It was but little changed. There was the tree which blocked the pathway. There were the brambles he had broken down to clear a space for his easel. A new growth of weeds and flowers had filled with luxuriant life the spot which had been so well trampled down, but every branch around was familiar, and there was the very one he had been obliged to lop off short so that it might not intercept his view. A little robin sat piping on a branch close by, as if utterly unconscious of his presence. He wondered if it was the same bird which had piped to him so often while he was painting his picture, and with whom he had so often shared his bread-and-butter and hard-boiled eggs.

What a change in himself since then—in little more than a year! The Lupton people had been utterly unknown to him. Now he was returning to the house an uninvited, but, he knew, a welcome guest; yet under

what miserable circumstances! He dared not dwell on them. It was folly to have come this way and thus conjure up the memory of that bright morning when his eyes had first encountered that exquisite face which had been with him night and day ever since. He turned hastily away and sprang over the fallen tree.

A white object lay on the ground before him. A pocket-handkerchief. He picked it up and examined the corner. Worked in fancy letters were the initials 'B. V.'

'Hers!' he exclaimed. 'How on earth could it have come here?'

It was quite dry, although the ground about was moist with the dew of a shady wood. It could only have been there a short time.

A thrill ran through his heart. She had been here quite recently. Was it to find consolation for his absence in visiting the spot where she had first seen him? He hardly dared to hope it.

He followed the path quickly, thinking he might overtake her; but he reached the seat

among the beech-trees near the house before he saw anyone.

Blanche was sitting there, on Sib's favourite seat, unconscious of his approach.

Presently his footsteps struck her ear, and she looked up. She hardly seemed surprised.

'I am soon back, you see,' he said quietly, taking his place beside her.

Her voice trembled a little as she answered:

'I had a sort of impression you would come. I don't know why, but it seems natural for you to be here after all our trouble. I did not feel yesterday that I was really saying good-bye to you.'

'That is strange, too. I certainly never thought of returning; but my plans are changed. My wife is coming back on Monday.'

'You are not going abroad?' she said quickly.

'No—not at present. Is this yours?' he added, holding up the handkerchief.

'Yes; where did you get it?'

'I found it in the wood just now—near the old spot where I made my sketch.'

A deep blush overspread Blanche's face, an unusual thing with her. Much as she loved Glyn, she did not care to let him see the outward signs of it, and this visit to the 'well-remembered spot' spoke volumes. She made no attempt at excuses, however.

'Let us go in. Kate will be so glad. It was better for you to come than to stay alone in London. We must try and keep up our spirits. We have all had enough to depress them lately.'

It was no good worrying Blanche and his sister with a recital of his new troubles. He would wait and see the result of the thorough examination of his wife's affairs which he proposed making. He simply told Kate that he had heard of his wife's coming on Monday, and that he thought he might as well return until that day, and Kate, whatever she might think of the prudence of the step, was exceedingly rejoiced that he had come.

The fact is, Glyn had made up his mind to enjoy the few days left at his disposal. One

cannot be always in extremes, and it is impossible that even grief can remain perpetually at high pressure; our weak frames cannot stand it. How often on going to a house of mourning after the death of someone dearly loved, where we have expected nothing but tears and lamentations, we have found cheerfulness, and even a mild kind of mirth. The grief has to some extent expended itself in the long and anxious watchings. The tears have run dry in the silence of the night or at the tomb of the loved one. Now each one does his best to cheer, and there are no outward and visible signs of sorrow.

Glyn slept in the same room he had occupied on the night of his first arrival at Lupton. He woke at the same hour in the morning. He opened his window and looked out upon the same scene, only it was later summer now and the roses were in still greater profusion. There were the bees as busy as ever, the beds of scarlet geraniums, the magnolia with its wondrous odour and shining leaves, the mosses and lichens, the quaint chimneys and the blue wreaths of

smoke. Over all, too, was the hush which one feels so mysteriously on the Sabbath morn. Is it that the very animals and insects are conscious of the day of rest? There was certainly a great stillness in the air, and even the sound of the bees came up with a soft subdued murmur which seemed more like a hymn of praise than the hum of busy life.

It was all so like the morning he remembered so well. So like! If he could only live in this hour, and not recall the past or anticipate the future. There are periods in the lives of all of us when we *must* live in the present; when we dare not look forward or back, or thought becomes intolerable. Glyn had reached one of these periods. Here were all outward influences unchanged, but within what a storehouse of bitter grief! Well, he had a respite of a few hours. He made up his mind to enjoy them, and so once more he drank in the freshness of the morning air which came in perfume-laden draughts to his window, and looked out to the far, far distance melting away until it was

nothing but a dim blue veil of such exquisite softness that it seemed hardly to belong to this world at all.

His coming had made them all more cheerful. Sib and Blanche and Kate would have been a sad trio without him. He seemed so much a part of themselves now, drawn to them by the closest possible ties. They all met on the terrace before breakfast, among the roses and geraniums and verbenas, with the bees buzzing about their heads, and evidently considering them intruders who had come to despoil them of half their rights in the world of flowers.

At the breakfast-table, too, they were quite cheerful, in spite of the sombre black which of course they all wore. In some mysterious way, black is generally becoming to a pretty woman—perhaps because there is nothing to distract the eye from the face. Certainly Glyn thought Blanche more lovely than ever; but, then, he thought this each time he saw her, so possibly the black had nothing to do with it.

'I think, if you don't mind, we will all walk

to church this morning. It will be so much nicer than driving,' said Blanche.

'It would be a sin to drive on such a morning,' said Glyn.

'We will go through the lower park under the beeches,' said Sib.

Of course Glyn went to church, though he was a bit of a Bohemian in this respect, and was not over-constant in his attendance. Church-going is an admirable thing, and exercises a most salutary influence on the mind; but I do not think people will be condemned to perpetual flames if they prefer now and then a walk in the woods, or over the crest of a breezy down. On this occasion, however, there were stronger attractions for Glyn than the woods or the downs. We have seen that he was far from perfect, and so once more he yielded to temptation.

The Vicar and his wife sauntered back a part of the way through the park with them. Mrs. Dyke was walking with the ladies, and Glyn fell into conversation with the husband.

'We called at Lupton on Friday,' said the

Vicar. You had left. They told me you were not coming back.'

'I came rather unexpectedly—only till to-morrow. After that I don't know when I may be here again.'

'What sad changes, and in a few months! Is she keeping up pretty well, do you think?'

'I trust so. Of course it is a terrible loss to her.'

'You, too, have had a sad loss, I regret to hear.'

'Yes, indeed—a very sad one, and quite sudden at the end.'

'You must be drawn together by a strong bond of sympathy. Does your sister make a long stay here?'

'I think it probable. It is a great resource to her naturally to have such a companion and friend as Miss Venables.'

'And to Miss Venables to have your sister. They will help each other.'

Kate turned at this moment.

'Glyn, did you bring my Prayer-book?'

'Yes; I have it in my pocket.'

The Vicar seemed struck with an idea.

'Of course, I had forgotten,' he said. 'I have been hearing that name very frequently lately, and under very peculiar circumstances. I had quite forgotten it was your Christian name. I have been wondering what made it appear so familiar to me.'

'What were the peculiar circumstances?' asked Glyn.

'Well, there is an old woman in the parish, who is in a very bad way. She is lying now almost at the point of death. She is off her head, poor thing! and keeps uttering the wildest nonsense about the coffin of a Mr. Glyn. We can't make out what she means. It struck me as an odd coincidence when I heard your name just now. It is not a common name in these parts.'

'The Glyns are well known in Sussex. My mother was a Glyn. About a coffin, did you say? What a very odd thing!'

'Very odd indeed. I was telling Mr. Beverley about old Mrs. Hurst, Miss Venables. You remember Mrs. Hurst?'

'Yes, perfectly,' said Blanche, falling back a step or two.

'She was always very odd, you know. The poor old soul is going fast, and lately she has been running on in a very queer way about a namesake of your friend here.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes. She keeps bringing in the name of Glyn in her ramblings.'

'How very strange!' said Blanche. 'Could she have known any of your family, Mr. Beverley?'

'I was just wondering,' answered Glyn.

'It has struck me that you might see her,' said the Vicar. 'I assure you we have been a good deal puzzled about the matter. There could be no harm in your coming. She might have something to say to you. There is evidently something on her mind.'

'I don't suppose she would make me her father confessor,' Glyn said laughingly. 'But if you have the least wish for me to come, of course I will do so.'

'I really should like you to. She would interest you as an artist, too, for she has a wonderful amount of character in her face. Not of the most agreeable kind, though.

What do you say? Will you walk down by-and-by and have a cup of tea with us? We dine early on Sunday.'

'I shall be very pleased,' said Glyn, who nevertheless thought it rather a bore to be taken away from Lupton. He had no reasonable excuse, however, for declining.

'I shall expect you, then. My dear, I think we must be going back. It is cheering to see you in the old place again, Miss Venables. Believe me, my dear girl,' he added in an undertone, 'it is the right thing for you to do, however great the trial may be.'

He wrung her hand warmly. Blanche turned quickly away to hide her tears. The Vicar and his wife returned to the village, and the rest pursued their way up through the chequered shade of the beech woods.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MRS. HURST'S CONFESSION.

GLYN returned to the village at about five o'clock, and made his way to the Vicarage. How strange it was to look back to that morning when he had had his first chat with Mr. and Mrs. Dyke about the Venables and Lupton! Now, in some indefinite way, he felt a sort of proprietorship in the place. At least, he felt that it was more his home than any other spot—the home towards which all his warmest sympathies inclined.

'Poor old Mrs. Hurst lives not very far from here,' said the Vicar. 'We will walk over to her after we have had a cup of tea.'

Half an hour later Glyn and the Vicar

arrived at the door of Mrs. Hurst's cottage. The Vicar gave a light tap and then opened the door, which led direct into the room where the old lady was lying.

She appeared to be dozing, and there was a little girl sitting by the bedside with a book in her lap.

'Well, Annie, how has she been to-day?' asked the Vicar.

'Pretty well, thank you, sir. She's been sleeping most of the day.'

'And you're not tired of your post?'

'No, thank you, sir.'

'That's a good little girl. It's astonishing the patience of some of these children, Beverley. The old lady used to be quite alone as long as she could get about, but now Annie has entire charge of her, and a capital little nurse she is, too,' he added, patting the child on the cheek.

The invalid stirred at the sound of the voices. Presently she turned her head.

Glyn was struck with her extraordinary appearance. Her eyes were deep sunk in her head, but still had a quick, restless motion

most unusual at her age. Her hair, which had been black, and was still only partially gray, hung in heavy masses about her forehead. The features even now bore traces of former beauty, but there was a strength and massiveness about the chin which rendered it almost masculine.

'I'll try the effect of your name upon her,' whispered the Vicar.

'Mrs. Hurst, I've brought Mr. Glyn Beverley to see you,' he said.

The sick woman did not at first seem to take in the meaning of the words. She looked at the two gentlemen who were now close by the bedside, without any apparent interest.

'What do you say?' she muttered.

'I've brought Mr. Glyn Beverley to see you,' repeated the Vicar in a louder voice.

Mrs. Hurst fixed her gaze on Glyn. As she did so, a sudden look of terror came into her face. By an effort which astonished them, she rose up quickly in the bed, and, leaning on her hands, stared at Glyn with wondering eyes.

'Great heavens! Are the dead alive again?' she exclaimed.

'What do you mean, Mrs. Hurst?' said the Vicar in considerable alarm.

The woman took no notice. Her gaze was still fixed immovably on Glyn.

'Richard, is that you?' she said in a softened voice. 'Oh, forgive me! oh, forgive me!'

'What on earth does she mean?' said the Vicar, more and more alarmed.

'It is strange,' Glyn replied in a low tone. 'My uncle Glyn's name was Richard. Could she have known him?'

The woman fell back upon her pillow.

'It is his ghost,' she cried. 'I know he is dead, dead, dead! He died in these arms. Oh me! oh me!'

'There is something in this which ought to be inquired into,' said the Vicar. 'What a lucky thing I brought you! Run away, Annie, for a little bit. I'll call you when you're wanted.'

The frightened child stole away, and the Vicar carefully closed the door.

'Speak to her, Beverley,' he said. 'I was sure there was something on her mind. We may find out what it is.'

Glyn advanced still closer, and took the old woman's withered hand.

'What is it, Mrs. Hurst?' he asked. 'Why are you so distressed? I am not Richard! Do you mean my uncle Richard?'

She opened her eyes again.

'You are not my Richard? But I tell you you are—my handsome Richard when I first knew him. I know you! I know you! You can't deceive Grace—your own Grace!'

She raised her thin hand and began smoothing Glyn's hair and cheek, drawing him with the other hand still closer towards her. The Vicar retreated to a small table at the side of the room, and, taking out some tablets, began to write. He had a keen eye to business at all times, and he felt that every word the old woman uttered was of importance.

'Soothe her, Beverley,' he said softly. 'I'll take down all she says.'

'I assure you my name is not Richard. Richard was my uncle,' said Glyn. 'I am Glyn Beverley.'

'Glyn Beverley?' the sick woman almost screamed. 'Her son—her son! How she hated me! But I paid her back—I paid her back! Ha, ha! ha, ha!'

She sank down on her pillow again. Glyn was horrified. She must refer to his dead mother.

'Do you mean that my mother, Kate Beverley, hated you?' he said. 'What did you know of her? She was never unkind to anyone.'

'Yes, she was. She hated me; I hated her—hated her! She robbed me of years of happiness; but she could not keep me from him when he died! I had her there—I had her there! Oh, and I was nicely avenged—I spoilt her life!'

'Hush, hush!' cried Glyn in horror. 'She is dead!'

'What do you say? Kate Beverley dead—dead before me? Why, she was ten years younger.'

'She is dead, I tell you. My dear mother —you have done her some cruel wrong. What is it?'

The old woman broke into a low moan, and lay back with closed eyes. All kinds of vague memories rushed into Glyn's mind. He fancied he had heard the name of Grace in connection with his uncle in some far-off days. He associated it in some indistinct way with a conversation he had overheard between his father and mother. The strangeness of this encounter confused him. He was glad to have a few moments to collect his thoughts.

The Vicar came to his side.

'Depend on it, there is something very important in all this. Don't lose the opportunity. What a mercy it was I brought you! 'Pon my word, truth is indeed stranger than fiction!'

He was interrupted by the sick woman. She was sitting up again, and beckoning to Glyn.

'Here, come here,' she said, seizing his hand again and drawing him close to her.

'I've been a very wicked woman,' she whispered. Then she glanced suspiciously at the Vicar. 'Send him away—send him away!' she said in a low tone. 'I don't want him. He has got nothing to do with it.'

The Vicar overheard her, and made a pretence of retiring. He called Glyn over to him.

'Get out of her all you can now. She is more lucid than I have seen her for a long time; and, besides, the doctor says she may go off at any moment.'

He then stationed himself outside the door, in the hope of hearing what passed within, for the Vicar, with all his goodness, was not devoid of curiosity, and in this case it was keenly aroused.

Mrs. Hurst was too deep for him, however. The moment he left the room she called Glyn to her side.

'Shut the door—shut it close. He must not hear—nobody but you must hear.'

More and more amazed, Glyn proceeded

to obey her. He explained matters to the somewhat discomfited Vicar, promising to call him in if necessary.

When he turned again towards the bed, he was startled and shocked at the change which had taken place. Old Mrs. Hurst lay back on the pillow looking like a dying woman. Her jaw had fallen, her eyes were closed, her hands lay helpless upon the coverlet. Glyn stooped over her and spoke almost in her ear.

'Mrs. Hurst, what is it you wished to say to me?'

There was no response. The lips moved slightly, but no words were audible. In much alarm, he hastily summoned the Vicar.

'I fear she is gone, and without unburthening her mind,' said Glyn.

The Vicar was equally alarmed. He turned quickly to a small cupboard beside the fireplace, and took thence the remains of a bottle of wine.

'It is lucky we kept the old soul supplied,' he said. 'This may revive her.'

He seized a spoon and pressed a little wine between her lips. Still there was no movement — no sign of life. Seriously alarmed, the Vicar felt her pulse.

'It is still fairly strong,' he said. 'It is the excitement which has prostrated her.' Then he addressed the sick woman. 'Mrs. Hurst, Mr. Glyn Beverley wants to say good-bye to you.'

Again the name seemed to send an electric thrill through the almost lifeless form. She started up again and clutched Glyn wildly by the arm.

'In the coffin—in the coffin! I put it there myself—under the body! Oh, Lord, have mercy on my wicked soul!'

Mrs. Hurst never spoke again. She fell back on her pillow, and for the few hours that she still lingered no sound crossed her lips. This was her only revelation.

'What on earth does she mean?' said the Vicar, as he and Glyn re-entered the lodge-gate at Lupton half an hour later. 'That is what she has been saying at intervals for the

last six weeks, and I couldn't conceive, and can't conceive now, what she is driving at.'

But Glyn had his own thoughts, which for the present he kept to himself.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MR. NORWOOD.

On his return to Lupton that evening, Glyn took his sister aside.

'Kate, did our dear mother ever speak of a person named Grace in connection with Uncle Glyn?'

'Grace, Grace—let me see. There is certainly some association with the name. Yes, I remember. There was a certain Grace Hurst, of somewhat questionable character, with whom he was very much in love in his young days.'

'Can you remember anything further?'

'It is so long since dear mamma referred to the subject. Let me see. I think she said she persuaded him to break off a dis-

reputable connection he had formed with this woman.'

'Was it likely that she was with him when he died?'

'That I do not know. It is very possible, though, for I quite remember dear mamma saying there were reasons why she was not with him at the last. He was a very strange man, you know. But why do you ask?'

'Because I have witnessed a most extraordinary and painful scene. Sit down, and I will tell you all about it.'

Glyn gave a minute account of the scene he had gone through at the cottage. Kate heard it in utter amazement.

'What a very marvellous thing, Glyn!'

'Marvellous indeed! Now that you have heard the story, what conclusion do you draw?'

'In what way do you mean?'

'To what did she refer when she spoke of putting something in the coffin?'

'I have not an idea; have you?'

'Yes. I am convinced she referred to the lost will.'

'Oh, Glyn! Surely it is not possible.'

'I am convinced of it, I tell you. What a mercy it was I came back to Lupton! No one can tell what important things may spring from it.'

'But what do you propose doing?'

'To follow up this clue.'

'But, Glyn, it was so long ago. I had almost forgotten the circumstances.'

'But I had not; the story impressed me very much when a boy. Since I have grown up, I have always felt that the matter was allowed to drop too easily. I believe my father was a man who hated trouble. You remember him better than I do.'

'He was always in bad health, you know; and dear mamma was too much engrossed in nursing him to think much of other matters.'

'And so a fine property was allowed to slip out of the family.'

'It seems so. But who could have anticipated such a thing as this?'

'At any rate, we will get to the bottom of it now. I shall go to Worthing to-morrow on my way to town.'

'You expect Laura to-morrow evening?'

'Yes; if her new friends do not carry her off on some other excursion, which is likely enough.'

'Do not speak bitterly of her, Glyn. She is shallow enough, I know; but I believe she loves you.'

'If she does, she has an odd way of showing it.'

'Make allowances for her little weaknesses, Glyn. Few women are perfect, you know.'

Glyn wondered what his sister would think when she heard of the debts, and the fearful burthen that they entailed; but he said nothing. What was the use of worrying her at such a time?

Of course Blanche was informed of the strange occurrence. They had a long discussion on the subject, and it was quite thought that Glyn should lose no time in seeing the solicitor who used to manage his uncle's affairs. They happened to remember his name, and that he lived at Worthing, so that Glyn did not apprehend much difficulty in finding him.

He left Lupton early the next morning in far better spirits than he could possibly have anticipated. However hopelessly a man may be in love, he cannot suddenly encounter the chance of stepping into a fine property without a certain sensation of pleasure. Of course, the chance was very remote, all was so vague and uncertain; but there was a pleasurable excitement in the thought of unravelling the mystery connected with the lost will, which in itself was a relief. Blanche was deeply interested in the matter, too, and of course he would now have to come to Lupton occasionally to let them know how matters were going on. It was arranged that Kate should stay at Lupton for a long time. This was of course another bond of union. There was one other view of the case, too, which caused Glyn additional lightness of heart. If by any remote chance the will should be discovered, and he should come into the estates, or a portion of them, he would have ample means to meet those dreadful liabilities which his marriage had entailed. He hardly dared hope for such a consummation. To be

suddenly relieved from a burthen which threatened to darken his future life was almost too good a thing to hope for. Still, there was the bare chance.

All these thoughts revolved in his mind as the South Coast line bore him steadily on towards Worthing. His eagerness increased as he neared the place; such momentous issues were involved. He passed out of the station and entered the first respectable shop which he came to. The shopkeeper was behind the counter.

'Can you tell me if there is a Mr. Norwood, a solicitor, living in Worthing?' Glyn asked.

'Oh yes, sir. One of the leading lawyers of the town, sir.'

'Perhaps you would kindly give me his address?'

'The office is, I think, No. 2 —— Street. Yes, I am sure it is—next to the corner house.'

'Is that far from here?'

'About ten minutes' walk. The boy shall show you the way if you like.'

'I'm much obliged. If you can spare him, I shall be glad.'

Under the guidance of the boy, Glyn soon found himself at the office door, whereon was a neat plate : 'Norwood and Sons, Solicitors.'

Having obtained admittance to the outer office, he inquired of a clerk if Mr. Norwood was at home, and was informed that he was, and that he would be disengaged in a few minutes. Meanwhile, would he be good enough to send up his name ?

Glyn produced his card, which was duly conveyed to the principal of the firm.

Presently Glyn was requested to walk up, and on doing so found himself in a room with a pleasant-looking man of about five-and-thirty.

'Your name is familiar to me, Mr. Beverley,' he said. 'Pray take that easy-chair. May I ask if you are related to the Mr. Beverley who married Miss Glyn of Firwolds ?'

'I am his son. I have, in fact, called on you to talk of some matters connected with my uncle's property.'

'Ah ! It is an old affair now. I'm afraid I know very little about it.'

'It is your father, I presume, who was my

uncle's solicitor,' said Glyn, remembering the plate on the door. 'He would probably know more about it.'

'My father, unfortunately, is dead. He died some years ago. I am the sole representative of the firm, although we still keep up the old name.'

This was a bad beginning. Glyn had counted on getting all particulars connected with his uncle's death, but this man was evidently too young to remember much about an event which occurred so many years before.

'You would probably be able to advise me how to proceed, at any rate. A very curious thing occurred yesterday in connection with this matter. I don't know if you ever heard anything of a will which was known to have been executed by my uncle, but which was never found?'

'Yes, I remember hearing that.'

'You will be astonished when I tell you I have strong reasons for believing that will to be in my uncle's coffin.'

Mr. Norwood looked at his visitor as if he had doubts of his sanity.

'You are startled, no doubt,' Glyn went on; 'but when I have told you of the occurrence to which I refer, I think you will be of my opinion.'

'It must be a very singular occurrence indeed to bring me to that opinion,' said the matter-of-fact lawyer. 'I see our discussion is likely to be a long one. Will you excuse me a moment?'

He touched the electric bell by his side, and immediately after a clerk appeared.

'If Mr. Maunsell calls, will you ask Mr. Patten to see him? Say I am particularly engaged.'

'Yes, sir.'

The clerk departed. Mr. Norwood settled himself in his own chair, and Glyn commenced his narrative touching Grace Hurst.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GLIMPSES OF THE PAST.

'It is certainly a most singular occurrence,' said Mr. Norwood, as Glyn concluded the account of his interview with the old lady in the cottage. 'It gives some colour, indeed, to your theory, although I am not yet prepared to admit it. The awkward part of the matter is that it would involve troublesome proceedings before we could satisfy ourselves as to the truth of the story.'

'Exhumation,' said Glyn.

'Precisely; and that is a serious matter.'

'This was one reason why I came to you. I feel it will be necessary. Could you undertake the business for me?'

'Certainly, if it is to be done. I have no

doubt a representation of the facts would obtain us the required permission. But I would not be too sanguine. After all, it may have been merely the ravings of a diseased mind—probably was.'

'The woman's statement, coupled with the loss of the will, makes me more sanguine,' said Glyn. 'There might be a doubt if we had only one of the facts to go upon.'

'Well, we shall see.'

'Of course these events carry one a long way back—to the time when I was young; in fact, I am in entire ignorance as to who is the present owner of the property.'

'I believe it to be a distant cousin of your uncle's. Stay,' he added, touching the bell; 'an idea has just occurred to me. We can, I think, get all the information we want, with very little trouble.'

A clerk appeared in answer to the bell.

'Is Mr. Patten disengaged?' asked the solicitor.

'Yes, sir. Mr. Maunsell has just left.'

'Ask him to step up.'

In a minute or two an elderly man entered

the room. He had been a trusted clerk of the Norwoods for some five-and-twenty years, and probably knew more about the ins and outs of the business than the principal himself, who was some fifteen years his junior. Mr. Patten was an integral part of the firm of Norwood and Sons, and was consulted on all important occasions.

'What is it, sir?' he inquired, as he advanced to the table.

'Patten, I believe you had a great deal to do with the affairs of the late Mr. Glyn, of Firwolds.'

'Yes, sir; I had a great deal to do with them.'

'Precisely. This gentleman is a nephew of the late Mr. Glyn—Mr. Beverley.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Mr. Patten, glancing at Glyn with some interest. 'A son of Mr. Glyn's sister Kate, sir, I presume?'

'Exactly,' said Glyn.

'Tell us what you know about the property, Mr. Patten. We want all the particulars,' said the lawyer.

The clerk smiled.

'All the particulars would take a long time to narrate, sir,' he answered.

'I have no doubt,' the lawyer replied. 'Perhaps,' he added, turning to Glyn, 'you had better put your questions on the points you wish cleared up.'

'I wish, first, to put a broad question,' said Glyn. 'That is, how has the property gone to a distant branch of the family?'

'For the simple reason that, in a moment of pique, it was willed to your uncle's second cousin, instead of to your mother. But perhaps I had better tell you the story from the beginning.'

'That would be the best plan,' said the lawyer.

'Your uncle had formed a strong attachment in early life to a person very much beneath him, and of somewhat disreputable character—a certain Grace Hurst. He would have married her when he came into the property, but your mother's earnest entreaties induced him to relinquish the idea. He was very fond of your mother, and, having given up Grace Hurst for her sake,

he looked forward to her companionship as a consolation. Unfortunately, your mother's marriage, to which he was strongly opposed, awakened a very bitter feeling against her. He considered that, having sacrificed his own feelings for her sake, she had no right to desert him. It was at this time that he made a will in favour of his cousin—the only will that was found, in fact.'

'But was not the estate entailed?' asked Glyn.

'The entail had been cut off on your uncle's accession to the estate, merely for the sake of rearrangement. For some reason or other it was not renewed—sheer negligence, I presume. At any rate, your uncle had the power of willing the property to anyone he liked. Later in life he renewed his connection with Grace Hurst, and, although he was not on actually bad terms with your mother, he saw very little of her. When he was seized with the illness which terminated in his death, he sent for Mr. Norwood, who received instructions to draw another will in favour of your mother and her children. I

perfectly remember the will being drawn. In fact, I took it to Firwolds myself for your uncle's signature. It was duly executed in the presence of witnesses, and we thought all was comfortably arranged. It was a great satisfaction to Mr. Norwood senior, who had always taken an interest in the matter. Your uncle wished to retain the will in his own possession. It was therefore left with him, but after his death it was never found.'

'Was Grace Hurst with him at his death?' asked Glyn.

'She was the only person with him. She had obtained complete control over him. In fact—although we have no proof against her—it was always our impression that she had induced him to destroy the will which he had made in favour of your mother.'

'Exactly,' said Glyn. 'And now, perhaps, I ought to tell you of an occurrence which confirms your suspicions.'

He then gave the clerk an account of the strange meeting with Grace Hurst at the cottage; of the revelation she had made at the last moment, and the conclusion he had

drawn from the circumstance. Mr. Patten was very much astonished.

'It has come about in a most extraordinary way,' he said, 'but it is quite a confirmation of my views. The matter must be gone into. It cannot rest here.'

'Decidedly not,' said Glyn.

'The body must be exhumed.'

'That is what we had decided on,' said Mr. Norwood. 'If the will should turn up, it will be quite a *cause célèbre*. You must be prepared to fight, Mr. Beverley. The present owners will not give up without a struggle.'

'What are the probabilities of success?' asked Glyn.

'That is a matter for counsel's opinion. You see, there are many complications, even supposing the will is found.'

'And possession for a certain number of years in itself constitutes a title, does it not?' asked Glyn.

'Under certain conditions. Not as against fraud. All these things must, of course, be gone into. Supposing there should be

reasonable grounds for an action, the next question is, Do you intend to fight ?'

'Certainly,' said Glyn; 'that is, if the game is worth the candle.'

'You may be quite easy on that score,' struck in Mr. Patten. 'The property is worth at least three times the amount it was at the time of your uncle's death. The railway passes close by, and they have built extensively. I should say it cannot be worth less than a hundred thousand pounds.'

'A hundred thousand pounds!' Glyn exclaimed. 'Do you mean to tell me it is worth as much as that ?'

'I do—every halfpenny of it.'

'The adjoining estate is bringing five hundred an acre for building purposes,' said Mr. Norwood.

Glyn was absolutely dazed by the prospect before him. He found it impossible to realize it.

'If you intend going on with the affair,' said Mr. Norwood, 'I ought perhaps to caution you that the legal expenses will be very considerable. You will excuse my

asking you if you are in a position to encounter them, for of course the present possessors will fight.'

Glyn reflected a moment.

'I shall have to consider the matter before I can give a definite answer,' he said. 'At any rate I can guarantee the preliminary expenses.'

'And you will leave the matter in my hands?'

'Certainly.'

'You will leave your address. Ah, I see it is on the card.'

'You will let me know when your arrangements are completed,' said Glyn. 'I will of course come down. By the way, I had almost forgotten to ask who is the present possessor.'

'A Mr. Dalrymple, a younger brother of the cousin to whom your uncle left the estate.'

'Dalrymple!' exclaimed Glyn in surprise. 'Do you happen to know if he has a nephew named D'Eyncourt?'

'I have not the least idea,' said the clerk.

'I only know that he has a large property in the North. He seldom visits Firwolds.'

'We have had little to do with the property since Mr. Dalrymple had it,' said the lawyer.

Glyn was in a reverie.

'It would be strange indeed if this were D'Eyncourt's uncle,' he thought; 'stranger still if it comes to my fighting him.'

He said good-morning to Mr. Norwood and his clerk, and sought the nearest hotel. On the whole he was full of hope. He wrote a long letter to his sister, giving a detailed account of his interview with the lawyer and enjoining her to convey all the particulars to Blanche.

Then he proceeded to the station and took his ticket for London. He would not reach home now much before his wife's arrival. The prospect of the scene he would have to go through was not enlivening, but he must face it as he had faced worse ills before.

CHAPTER XL.

ON BOARD THE FOLKESTONE BOAT.

The mid-day steamer for England was belching forth its superfluous steam alongside the quay in the harbour of Boulogne. It was just on the point of departure. Late passengers were hurrying across the gangway, luggage was being hurriedly hoisted on board, and the usual group of idlers lining the quay looked on with such intense interest that one might have supposed the departure of a boat was an event which occurred about once a month instead of twice a day.

Mrs. Glyn Beverley sat on deck with a French novel on her lap and her travelling-bag by her side. Annette was busy looking after the luggage. The day was fine. The

female portion of the passengers produced their books and knitting, and disposed themselves in picturesque attitudes about the deck. The men lounged on the raised deck amidships with their cigars. It was quite possible that, outside, Neptune was preparing a little sea which would upset these arrangements in a few minutes, but the calm within the harbour and the bright sunshine forbade such gloomy anticipations.

At the very last moment an old friend comes hurrying on board—no less a person than Captain D'Eyncourt. He is as handsome as ever, but there are symptoms of anxiety in his face, or, perhaps, rather the traces of past anxieties, for at present he seems unusually lively. He throws the light valise he carries into a corner of a seat with his ulster over it. Then he takes out his cigar-case.

He is about to select one, when his eyes light upon the *ci-devant* widow, and the cigar-case is instantly closed with a snap.

'By Jove! what a rencontre!' he exclaims. The next moment he is by the fair lady's

side. Annette is still at a respectful distance, and, seeing the meeting, she maintains it, but she is keenly observant.

'I hope Mrs. Glyn Beverley is in her usual health,' says the Captain.

'George!' gasps the little woman. 'Oh, Captain D'Eyncourt, how you frightened me!'

The Captain seated himself by her side. The vessel was gliding out between the piers now, and luckily Neptune was propitious; the sea was as calm as the proverbial mirror.

'Perhaps it would be as well to drop the Christian name now you are married,' says the Captain.

'You rather took my breath away. Where have you dropped from?'

'From Monaco direct. I stayed on shore to the last to get something decent to eat, for I have come right through. That venerable uncle of mine is dead.'

'Dead?'

'As a doornail. The eight thousand pounds a year may prove no fiction, after all, if the old man has forgiven my peccadilloes.'

'You always manage to fall on your feet. I think you deserve the money, for you have told lies enough in connection with it.'

'It has been convenient, I admit. It will be more convenient if I get it, for I have been awfully hard hit.'

'That seems to be your usual fate. I should have thought you would have learned wisdom by this time.'

'Has the immaculate artist taught it to you? What about the little liabilities? Are they wiped off yet?'

Mrs. Beverley's pretty lips give a sudden twitch, but she does not reply.

'At any rate, they were a good excuse for cutting off the supplies,' continues the Captain.

'Don't be ungenerous. You know I never refused you as long as I was able to send. You know I could not well do so after I was married. You could not expect it. In fact, it was a bargain.'

'Yes, but my part of the plot failed. The old man was my sheet-anchor. Who could have known he would go off the hooks so

suddenly? I believe she would have consented if he had lived. I saw signs of relenting.'

'Did you?'

'I know you were always sceptical. However, you played your part well. I suppose I ought to thank you, although I lost. I hope you have your reward.'

'I am very well contented, thanks.'

'I trust I shall be, too, now that my good uncle has cleared out. I really begin to have faith in Providence, and to believe that everything happens for the best. But how is it I find you alone — you, a young and blooming bride?'

The sarcasm has no effect on Laura's serene face. She takes no notice of it.

'I suppose I ought to tell you that they have met,' she says.

'They! Who?'

'Glyn and Blanche, of course.'

'Confound it!' said the Captain. 'Why on earth didn't you prevent it?' he added.

'I had no notion where she was. I thought we were safe at Zermatt.'

'They met there?'

'Yes, by pure accident.'

'What the dickens did you do?'

'I was not with them. It all came out. He knows she never wrote that letter.'

'Did he tell you so?'

'Yes. Don't talk about it. It was a *mauvais quart d'heure* which I don't care to recall.'

'Did he suspect you?'

'Of course he did.'

'And me?'

'Naturally. How could he think otherwise?'

'You must tell me how you got out of it. It is too good a joke.'

Culpable as she is, even Laura is disgusted with the man's intolerable levity. She loses patience a little.

'By resorting to your practice—lying,' she says.

'You are certainly becoming moral. The divine influence of art is beginning to tell.'

'Look here, George,' she says in an undertone: 'I am glad I have met you, for I am

getting very tired of all this. Let us come to some distinct understanding.'

'*Prenez garde*,' says D'Eyncourt suddenly, as some people seated themselves close by on the other side of the bench. 'Come further aft,' he adds in an undertone. 'There is a place yonder where we shall not be interrupted.'

They move over to it. Laura sits for a moment with her eyes fixed on the wreaths of white foam that go scurrying away from the vessel's quarter. She had seldom looked so sad. Is there a touch of penitence in her mind, and a longing for better things?

'If you get this money,' she says at length, 'as I hope you will, you will need no further help from me.'

'Well?'

'There will be no necessity for us to meet again—ever.'

'No necessity, certainly.'

'Then why should we? It is far better not. It always pains me—now.'

'You are complimentary.'

'You must know what I mean. You have

been the one bad influence of my life. You know it. But for you, I believe I should have been a tolerably good woman.'

'Spare your reproaches.'

'I am not reproaching; I have got beyond that. I am simply stating facts. You poisoned my very girlhood. You have been a dark shadow on my life.'

'Don't go into heroics, for Heaven's sake! I have given you fortune and position, and a man you profess to love for a—husband. What more do you want?'

'It is useless to tell you. You would not believe me.'

'I will try—go on.'

'I have had yearnings of late—believe it or not, as you will—to lead a better life. It is all excitement now—I cannot live without it. But if I could only shake off this weary load of deceit——'

'You know that is impossible,' says D'Eyncourt, interrupting her.

'I know it is. But I need not be constantly reminded of it by your presence.'

'There you do me an injustice. I have

not troubled you for—let me see—nearly three months.'

'Well, will you promise not to do so again?'

'If the uncle has turned up trumps, yes.'

'You will never voluntarily seek me?'

'I will try carefully to avoid you.'

He looks up with his usual half-sarcastic expression. To his surprise, tears are glistening in Laura's eyes.

'Don't make a scene, Laura. Don't take to crying at your time of life.'

'George, I do believe you are a very devil!' she says, and with that she turns away so that he can no longer see her face, and there is a short interval of silence, broken only by the beat of the paddle.

Presently he says:

'But all this time you have not told me how it is you are alone. You are not divorced yet, surely!'

'Glyn is in London. He has just lost his mother. By his wish I stayed in Paris, thinking he intended to return there; but he has telegraphed for me.'

'Why?'

'I have no idea.'

'It is as well for me to avoid him, at any rate. He may put some awkward questions.'

'He probably would.'

'He would find it hard to worm the truth out of me,' says D'Eyncourt with a laugh. 'He has not a shadow of proof. By the way, what became of that letter?'

'It was destroyed.'

'Burnt?'

'No—torn up, if I remember rightly.'

The Captain looked a little anxious.

'It was infernally imprudent of you not to burn it. You women are so frightfully careless. Of course, you burnt mine?'

'I believe it shared the fate of the other.'

'I'll tell you what, Mrs. Beverley. It seems to me that you have rather a clever trick of putting your neck into a halter.'

'I have not done so yet, at any rate.'

'It was most abominably imprudent, nevertheless.'

'Why, who would take the trouble to read it?'

'That's what you women always think. I like to put these things out of sight altogether. You have not learnt wisdom with years, Laura.'

'Well, at least, there will be no need of caution in future if you keep to your promise.'

'Always supposing the uncle has turned up trumps.'

'As I fervently hope he has.'

'Amen. And now I think I will have a smoke. We shall have time for another little chat before we get across. Keep up your spirits.'

He turns away, and then stops abruptly.

'Why, there is that black-eyed vixen of yours watching us all the time. I always hated that girl. Why don't you get rid of her?'

'She suits me very well, thank you,' says Laura, with a slight touch of his own sarcasm.

D'Eyncourt mounts the raised deck and

falls into easy conversation with the captain. As for Laura, she sits watching the white foam and revolving many things in her mind. Perhaps, after all, there is some excuse for the life of excitement she leads.

END OF VOL. II.

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